

ולשוננו רנה

לכבוד שמחת בת מצוה של
רינה צפרא טורטשינר

שבת קדש
פרשת והייתם קדושים
כ"ט ניסן תשע"ה

ולשוננו רנה

In gratitude to HaShem as Rena reaches the age of mitzvot, we have prepared this commentary to part of the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avot.

The sixth chapter, compiled of *braitot* after the rest of Pirkei Avot, includes a list of 48 traits which are the means of making Torah our own. As we studied the list, we realized that it describes four different facets of the complete student of Torah: Mind, Heart, Conduct and Community. Our commentary explores these four facets, through the eyes of traditional commentators and with our own added thoughts.

In our studies, we benefited from the thirteenth century commentary of Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher, also known as Rabbeinu Bechayye; the nineteenth century *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary of Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz; and the twentieth century anthology of commentaries published by Pinchas Kehati. Along the way, we observed that there are multiple ways to divide the list of traits into 48 units; our list is that of Pinchas Kehati.

We present this book to you at the start of the Omer period. The Omer primarily marks the 49-day harvest period between a barley offering brought in the Beit haMikdash on the 16th of Nisan and a wheat offering brought in the Beit haMikdash on the 6th of Sivan. However, as noted by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 489:1-3), the Omer also commemorates the period from the Exodus, when the Jews left Egypt, until the Jews received the Torah at Mount Sinai. In that light, this is an ideal time for us to study the traits necessary for success in Torah study, and so we have linked each trait with a day of the Omer.

May you find as much meaning in the 48 Traits as we did; please share your own thoughts with us.

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1 תלמוד Learning

MIND

The list of forty-eight traits begins with a series of five which focus on the Mind and the way we learn. The first of these is the act of learning.

Including “learning” on a list of traits necessary for success in learning may seem redundant, but it is necessary. In Judaism, each individual’s connection with G-d is personal, and so we might think to look inward for spiritual insight. However, as Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explains here, Judaism teaches that Torah is not something one invents or deduces. Torah relies on revelation.

Along similar lines, Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblatt has noted that one of the central lessons of the presentation of Torah at Sinai is the humbling awareness that knowledge can come from outside of ourselves. Understanding this is a major step in growing in Torah. [Note, though, that traits four and five will require that the student apply personal intuition in the learning process; there must be a balance.]

Taking another approach, Pinchas Kehati explains that placing “learning” on this list emphasizes the quantity of one’s learning. Success comes with diligent and continuous study, and with an openness to learning from everyone.

In a third approach, Rabbeinu Bechayye suggests that “learning” refers not only to the act of learning or amount of learning, but also to the style of study. Within Torah, one must learn *how* to learn. Even translating words requires expertise in the set of rules which govern our analysis.

2 שמיעת האוזן

Listening with the Ear

MIND

With the second learning-centred trait, our list instructs the student to listen, but it emphasizes the ear. According to Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz, this is meant to indicate complete focus and dedication of one's faculties to the listening and learning experience. Similarly, Rabbeinu Bechayye writes that listening well requires patience, saying one must "be careful to hear all parts of what is said, and not respond until the teacher finishes." He quotes Kohelet 4:17, "Being ready to listen is greater than the offerings brought by fools."

As Rabbi Lipschitz said, listening thoroughly presents a challenge. And as Rabbeinu Bechayye expanded, listening to every word is even more challenging. In the act of listening we put our own thoughts on hold to hear what someone else wishes to say, and to explore their point of view. We already noted regarding the first trait (Learning) that success in Torah study requires the humbling awareness that knowledge can come from outside of ourselves; the logical result of that awareness is that we must be ready to listen.

Pinchas Kehati adds another perspective, emphasizing the role of auditory processing. He states that one should learn aloud, making study audible to her ears. Listening is not only about receiving input from others; it is also about a unique way of receiving information. Scientists who study cognition recommend greater involvement of sensory memory, for information then to be stored in long-term memory. Also, learning aloud helps the student avoid distraction. [See <http://www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/education/Multimodal-Learning-Through-Media.pdf>]

3 עריכת שפתיים

Arrangement of the Lips

MIND

As it did for the previous trait, our list mentions an aspect of study and a part of the body. Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explains that “arrangement of the lips” means that a student must make sure the words she learns are fluent in her mouth.

Pinchas Kehati takes this a step further, emphasizing the importance of reviewing our learning; a student must repeat her lessons many times, to the point that they will be “arranged upon her lips”. He cites the Talmud (Eruvin 54a), which sees this lesson in Mishlei 22:18, “It is pleasant when you guard them within yourself; they are established together upon your lips.”

The observations cited above speak to the heart of what Torah study is about. Devarim 6:7 uses the word *v'shinantam* to describe the act of teaching, and the Talmud (Kiddushin 30a) notes that the Hebrew verb *sh-n-n* refers to that which is sharp. Based on this, the *v'shinantam* imperative instructs, “The words of Torah must be sharp in your mouth, such that if one were to ask you something, you would not stammer and tell him, but you would tell him immediately.” Our list says that this is not only true of teaching Torah; it is also true for personal study. Our definition of success includes not only familiarity, but fluency.

Rabbeinu Bechayye contends that this trait addresses the teacher. He writes, “There is one who is learned, but who does not know how to arrange it upon his lips and to express it with the language which is suitable for stating it and making it understood by each person appropriately. This is important.”

4 בינת הלב Comprehension of the Heart

MIND

Again, our list pairs an aspect of study with a part of the body. As it used here, the “heart” is understood to refer to comprehension. Per Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz, a student must contemplate the words she has been taught, in order to deduce further lessons from them. Indeed, according to the Talmud (Shabbat 31a), one of the six questions we are asked in the next world is, “Did you deduce lessons from the ones you were taught?”

Rabbeinu Bechayye explains that this sort of deduction is a natural part of the process of study. A teacher’s peech cannot convey everything; certain lessons require other lessons as preface, or knowledge in other areas, and together these can lead to new ideas and greater comprehension.

For the first time in our list, this trait isolates the student from the teacher and the text. Certainly, a well-written text guides the student toward personal insight, and an expert teacher asks questions which enable a student to develop new ideas. However, the onus is fundamentally upon the student to take the next step, toward “comprehension of the heart”.

As Rabbi Lipschitz writes, this progress requires contemplation, reviewing that which has been learned and examining it from multiple angles. However, as Rabbeinu Bechayye notes, it also relies upon the student’s extramural knowledge and experiences. The more broad one’s knowledge of related fields of study and of the world at large, the greater the number and depth of connections the student will be able to make.

5 שכלות הלב Insight of the Heart

MIND

Concluding this segment of traits which focus on the Mind, our list instructs the student to develop insight of the heart. How does this differ from the “understanding of the heart” identified in the previous trait?

Commentators note the Hebrew word *sichlut*, which is associated with visual examination (*l'histakef*). Rabbeinu Bechayye writes, “This is the need to examine with one’s thoughts, even where possessing additional knowledge beforehand is not required.” The previous trait spoke of extrapolating from one’s lessons; this trait calls upon the student of Torah to apply her brain to fully understand the lessons themselves.

Like the previous trait, this trait emphasizes the importance of the student’s own contribution to the learning process. Both traits underscore the importance of each person’s individual mind and unique life. This demands that we ask, though: With our varied natures, how can we know that all of us will come to the truth of Torah?

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson (Tziyun Yerushalayim to Talmud Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4) expressed a relevant thought in explaining how human beings are created “in the image of G-d.” He noted that G-d is everywhere, affecting everything on multiple levels, and yet G-d is One. Similarly, human beings are scattered and varied, but we are actually one. Perhaps, then, we may contend that despite the apparent diversity of our minds, we are all of a single, true, shared nature - which, when applied to Torah study, will come to truth.

6/7 אימה, יראה Fear, Reverence

HEART

These traits begin a series of four which address the successful student's attitude toward learning, and toward life.

Many commentators explain the sixth and seventh traits as similar, expressing the great respect necessary when approaching Torah. For example, Rabbeinu Bechayye writes, “[O]ne should fear speaking incorrectly and corrupting Torah. Sometimes an error can lead to great denial [of religious truth]; therefore, repetition of the trait [for emphasis] was necessary.”

Reverence is required in order to assure that one will learn properly. Many talmudic sources (e.g. Avot 1:11; Shabbat 30b; Chagigah 15b) discuss the need for both teacher and student to feel the gravity of their task, in order to ensure that they will carry it out properly. Indeed, the Talmud (Yoma 4a-b) records a view that Moshe Rabbeinu needed to spend six days enveloped in a cloud (Shemot 24:16) before he could receive the Torah, in order to ensure that he would be appropriately respectful of the Torah he was to learn and teach.

These traits are about more than respect, though. These traits charge the student to see in herself more than an individual student; the student is transformed into a repository of the *masorah* (tradition), responsible to learn it thoroughly and transmit it accurately. For the first time in our list, the student is told that these 48 Traits are about more than personal success; these are the ingredients for our national success.

היום ששה ימים לעומר.
היום שבעה ימים שהם שבוע אחד לעומר.

8 ענוה Humility

HEART

We have already seen humility as an underlying element in the first and second traits, and it leads to several more traits we will see among the forty-eight. Among other benefits, humility allows a student to ask questions, acknowledge error and learn from every potential teacher.

Here, though, humility is presented as independently valuable for Torah study, even without any particular behaviour. As the Talmud (Taanit 7a) teaches, “Why is Torah compared to water? To teach you: just as water flows from elevated places to lower places, so Torah endures only in a humble mind.”

Perhaps we may suggest that humility is valuable not only because of its impact on the way one studies and approaches information, but also because only a humble person can truly comprehend Torah. Our Torah teaches lessons of humility regarding the behaviour of our greatest leaders, such as Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid haMelech. The Talmud (Megilah 31a) even describes HaShem as humble. On the other hand, the Torah’s villains - Lavan, Pharaoh, Nevuchadnezzar, Haman - tend to be arrogant in the extreme.

One who lacks humility will not understand what the Torah is trying to convey in teaching us about our heroes and villains, but one who is humble will find in their stories profound guidance.

9 שמחה Joy

HEART

Joy concludes a four-part series of traits that focus on the heart of the student; commentators see two distinct ways in which joy is an important influence.

According to Rabbeinu Bechayye, joy enables scholarship: we learn that which we enjoy learning. If we find ourselves unhappy, we will stop learning, and we won't spend the time needed to fully absorb lessons and commit them to memory. Joy guarantees that we will spend the necessary time in learning Torah.

We might expand upon Rabbeinu Bechayye's idea: joy balances the sixth and seventh traits, which emphasized reverence and fear. The successful student is afraid to misrepresent Torah; she fully and thoroughly reveres G-d, author of the Torah. Positively, this reverence spurs the student to greater caution in learning, analyzing and teaching Torah. However, it might also lead a person to a learning-limiting anxiety, and even to closing the text and leaving the classroom. Therefore our list adds the need for joy. The satisfaction that comes with learning must outweigh the fear in the mind of the student.

Taking joy in a different direction, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz and Pinchas Kehati understand that being happy plays an essential role in successful study. As Pinchas Kehati writes, "Joy broadens the heart, sharpens the mind and assists in memory function." The happy student is not only more willing to learn, but better suited to do so.

10 שימוש חכמים Serving Sages

COMMUNITY

The successful student of Torah does not function in a vacuum; as we will see, at least seven of the forty-eight traits emphasize the relationships which create a community of study. The first of these, beginning a series of three community-centred traits, is Serving Sages.

Rabbeinu Bechayye explains a utilitarian benefit of this trait: the goal of service is to make an impact on our teachers. Because the student serves the teacher, the teacher will feel affection toward the student and be more willing to teach. We might also suggest that the student who engages in *shimush* develops greater commitment to her studies by habituating herself to support of Torah.

The more common approach, brought by Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz and mentioned by Rabbeinu Bechayye, is that one who serves the sages learns valuable lessons in the course of observing their day-to-day conduct and experiencing personal interaction with them. As the Talmud (Berachot 7b) teaches, “Service of Torah is greater than its study.”

It is worth noting that there is another approach to *shimush*. Rashi (Megilah 26b, for example) explains *shimush* as a form of scholastic internship. In that light, the tenth trait harks back to the first trait, and its lesson of finding a mentor and learning from that mentor. One must do more than simply learn from teachers; it is valuable to develop a long-term apprenticeship, which will offer a more robust learning opportunity.

11 דקדוק חברים Precision via Peers

COMMUNITY

This is the first trait to emphasize the impact of a peer group upon a student. The commentators tend to explain it as a meta-trait, in which participation in a positive peer group influences a student's path.

Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explain the benefits of a peer group as role models for scholarship, demonstrating ways to employ a precise ear in drawing lessons from their teacher's words and from the language of a text. Exposure to their lead will expand a student's intellectual horizon.

Pinchas Kehati cites an additional idea from Rabbi Shemuel Wachsman's *Emunat Shemuel* commentary. According to this approach, the role of precision is in choosing a peer group. By being exacting in selecting her company, a student can establish for herself a set of positive role models.

We might also explain this trait as aiding each individual act of Torah study. Personal study has many pitfalls, including the lack of an outsider's perspective to raise new questions and point out logical flaws. Indeed, the Talmud (Berachot 63b) even prohibits learning Torah alone. Having colleagues with whom to approach the Torah's text enables us to deepen our study and improve upon it.

12 פלפול התלמידים Sharpness of Students

COMMUNITY

The “students” in our list’s third community-centred trait might refer to the student’s own students, or to her fellow students. Either way, as Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz cites from the Talmud (Bava Metzia 84a), “as a result of the questions and answers among them, learning is expanded.”

Rabbeinu Bechayye links the text’s unique term, *pilpul*, with *pilpel*, pepper. The pepper is hot, and as a result of the heated drive to challenge, new insights are born and our intellects are pushed further. Rabbeinu Bechayye may be suggesting that we learn not only from the students’ questions, but also from the heated learning environment they create. Similarly, in a 2001 article, *Studying the Talmud*, Dr. Henry Abramson wrote, “The Greek model of education that animates the university is primarily one in which the teachers provide the students with information. This transaction takes place in an almost commercial fashion: we know certain things, or how to do certain things, and for a price, we will give this knowledge to the students. The Socratic method is merely a variation on this theme, in which we help students realize that which they could have known had they received training in proper thinking. The Talmud, however, asserts that learning is not a type of transaction in which goods are exchanged. The student and teacher are locked in a symbiotic relationship, from which the teacher gains the most from the activity of the student. ... It’s not so much what the student knows that makes the difference ... It is rather the attitude to learning that the students infuse in the relationship—their energy and thirst for knowledge is a constant inspiration, and can make us remember that teaching is a calling as well as a profession.”

היום שנים עשר יום שהם שבוע אחד וחמשה ימים לעומר.

13 ישוב Settling

HEART / MIND / CONDUCT

Commentators differ in explaining the thirteenth trait, in part because its title is similar to that of the forty-first trait. Here is a selection of views:

Rabbeinu Bechayye offers a view that “settling” refers to one’s attitude. The successful student is not driven to elevate herself and defeat others.

Rabbeinu Bechayye also cites a view explaining “settling” as referring to one’s scholastic approach to studying Torah; the successful student tries to reconcile apparently contradictory sources. A student might be tempted to write off challenging sources as irreconcilable, or to dismiss the problem as a function of our personal ignorance. However, we will learn far more from an honest attempt to get to the heart of each source, and to comprehend their shared language. A student who gives up easily may stop just short of a world-changing revelation, and never know how close she was to a transformative view of the Divine message.

Finally, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz suggests that “settling” may be about one’s conduct outside of the study hall. He writes, “To be expert in settling this world, whether in terms of human affairs or the natural wisdom and studies which can serve as a spice for the sacred Torah. These will be his servants, causing Torah to be understood well. All of them are included as part of Torah. Also, this will cause the student to be pleasing and attractive in others’ eyes.”

14/15 מקרא, משנה Tanach, Mishnah

MIND

Of all 48 traits, only these two speak of expertise in a particular field of Torah: the verses of Tanach (Scripture), and the laws of the Mishnah.

Tanach and Mishnah represent two radically different styles of Torah. Tanach has always been a written tradition, passed from generation to generation as a text available for independent study. Mishnah was originally a verbal tradition, a set of laws taught by teacher to student, until it was put into writing when we lived under Roman rule. The successful student of Torah must master both styles, excelling in learning on her own and in learning as part of a community.

It is also worth noting that Tanach and Mishnah are essential building blocks, and yet they are often neglected in the face of the more popular study of Gemara. However, Pirkei Avot does not present Gemara expertise as one of the 48 Traits of successful Torah study; the building blocks are the critical tools.

Rabbeinu Bechayye sees in the fourteenth trait an additional point. Not only must the successful student of Torah have expertise in Scripture, but the student must also know the Masoretic tradition with its nuances, as well as the hermeneutic methods with which we link verse with law. From this perspective, we see here the core elements of rabbinic tradition: knowledge of a breadth of text, and application of deep analytical methodology. [See Berachot 64b regarding the “Sinai” and the “Uprooter of Mountains”.]

היום ארבעה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות לעומר.
היום חמשה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות ויום אחד לעומר.

16 מיעוט שינה Reduced sleep

CONDUCT

We have seen advice regarding the Mind and Heart of a successful student of Torah. We have also seen an emphasis on the Community of Study which enables success. With the sixteenth trait, we begin a series of five traits which explore ways in which Conduct outside the realm of study impacts on scholastic success. These traits are framed in the negative, describing activity to avoid.

The sixteenth trait prescribes reduced sleep, which seems to contradict Rambam's recommendation of eight hours of sleep per night. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deiot 4:4) It also seems to contradict contemporary scientific thinking, which positively links sleep with retention of learning. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3768102/>) However, commentators have noted that this trait is not a statement against all sleep:

- Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz contends that only excessive sleep is proscribed, as a waste of time and a cause for one's intellect to sleep. [He also contends that after the age of fifty, one's body does not need as much sleep. Please see your physician for practical advice!]
- Rabbeinu Bechayye suggests that the issue here is not the amount of sleep, but the focus of one's day. He asks: Is sleep a means toward accumulating the energy we need to achieve a positive end, or is it the goal of our day?

Echoing Rabbeinu Bechayye, we might note the observation of Rashi to Bereishit 37:1-2. Even though the Talmud (Sanhedrin 71b-72a) observes that quiet lives are good for the righteous, and the world benefits when righteous people are able to live undisturbed, our goal should not be an undisturbed life.

היום ששה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות ושני ימים לעומר.

17 מיעוט שיחה Reduced chatter

CONDUCT

The seventeenth trait tells the student to reduce *sichah*, which is often translated as chatter, or insubstantive conversation. [But see Tehillim 119:99 and Iyov 15:4.] Thus, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz renders *sichah* here as “words of no import.” Pinchas Kehati points us to the imperative of Devarim 6:7, “You shall speak regarding [Torah],” on which the Talmud (Yoma 19b) comments, “and you shall not speak regarding empty matters.” Further, unpressured interaction is pleasant and habit-forming, drawing a student into conversation which may be friendly and socially constructive, but which will not add to her scholarship.

In truth, other traits encourage students of Torah to surround themselves with teachers and colleagues, both in the context of study and beyond. Realistically, living and learning in a communal environment necessitates interaction. Further, as the Talmud (Yoma 86a) stresses, one must be sure to interact gently with others; ignoring other human beings would be inconsistent with Torah conduct. Therefore, one cannot and should not eliminate “words of no import” entirely.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz further notes that chatter can serve a mental health purpose, “causing the spirit to rest a bit.”

The task of the student of Torah is to recognize that chatter can take away from her successful learning, and therefore to gauge her needs carefully. The successful student will find a positive balance.

18/19 מיעוט תענוג ושחוק Reduced pleasure & laughter

CONDUCT

These two traits, like their two antecedents, encourage the student to reduce activities which could detract from success in Torah study. As Rabbeinu Bechayye explains, physical pleasure and laughter turn our focus from the intellect. [Similarly, see Berachot 63b.]

The sages distinguished between pleasure and laughter. Pleasure is value-neutral, rejected only to the extent that it distracts from study. Laughter, on the other hand, is seen as inherently leading to frivolity. For a few examples, see Mishlei 21:24 and Tehillim 1:1, and Avodah Zarah 18b-19a.

As he did regarding chatter, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz comments that some laughter is needed in order to gladden the heart. The point is not to crush one's soul into sobriety, but to warn the student regarding a powerful magnet. The Talmud (Chagigah 14b, Shabbat 147b) even blames pleasure for the downfall of one of the greatest talmudic sages, Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. Therefore, we are warned to keep a close guard on these habit-forming behaviours.

It is worth noting that the ninth trait promoted *simchah*, or joy. One possible distinction between the positive *simchah* and the negative *schok* is that a student's *simchah* is the joy she draws from learning, while *schok* is laughter that stems from distraction. [See Berachot 31a.] It is productive for the student to revel in the joy of learning, but not to immerse herself in the laughter of other pursuits.

היום שמונה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות וארבעה ימים לעומר.
היום תשעה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות וחמשה ימים לעומר.

20 מיעוט דרך ארץ Reduced socializing

CONDUCT

The twentieth trait concludes the list of behaviours that the successful student will avoid by warning her to reduce social interaction. This expands the seventeenth trait (Reduced chatter); social interaction is not necessarily meaningless, but the student is warned that it will diminish her learning. As Rabbeinu Bechayye writes, “the student should be isolated, and not mingle other than in a situation of great need.” Rashi is less broad in interpreting this advice, writing only that the student should stay out of the market. Rashi’s approach may stem from Rabbi Akiva’s advice to his son, “Do not study at the height of the city.” (Pesachim 112a)

Like the warning against chatter, this trait runs afoul of the social environment necessary for advanced Torah study. Further, we are responsible to serve our communities; the Talmud (Sotah 47a) praises the *eshkolot* who excelled in both Torah study and communal leadership. In addition, one grows from involvement in the community. Nonetheless, every activity comes with a cost in time and energy, and this trait warns that as valuable as communal interaction may be, it will exact a price in terms of our success in Torah study. Sometimes that price may be worth paying; for example, the Talmud (Megilah 29a-b) instructs us to halt Torah study in order to gladden a bride and groom, even though this will surely reduce our time for learning. The responsible student of Torah is aware of the costs, and makes the calculation wisely.

21 ארך אפים Slow to anger

HEART

We begin a set of sixteen personality-centred traits by warning against anger. In this our list is consistent with the sum of biblical and rabbinic literature, which consistently blame anger for clouded thinking, hasty judgment, and general negative results. [See, for example, Bereishit 4:5, 30:2 and 39:19, and Vayikra 10:16, and midrashim thereon.] Rambam writes that anger is one of a small set of traits which must be entirely shunned. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deiot 2:3)

Rabbeinu Bechayye notes that anger “causes knowledge to be forgotten, confuses the heart, and hides the truth.” This may be explained naturally; during learning our anger and stress deny us the focus needed to develop memories, and in the recall stage these same phenomena turn our mind away from tracking down those connections. Anger can also cause us to lose patience with the whole process of learning.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz adds that anger is also harmful for one’s body; the student who grows angry is harming herself. We might also note that anger prevents the interactions that facilitate learning. One who displays a short temper will experience difficulty finding good mentors and chavrutot.

Students of Torah might be forgiven for thinking that anger is appropriate; after all, the Torah ascribes anger to G-d at times. However, per Rambam, describing G-d as “angry” generally means only that G-d acted in a way that caused destruction. (Moreh haNevuchim 2:29)

לב טוב 22 A good heart

HEART

The term “good heart” is generally understood to refer to a generous spirit. Certainly, this is a fine attribute; per Avot 2:9, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai considered it the greatest trait to pursue. But how will generosity assist a person in learning?

Rabbeinu Bechayye’s comment regarding the benefit of a good heart provides a basis for an observation we presented regarding the eighth trait (Humility). He writes, “The heart is the source for all thoughts. When it is good, he will achieve his purpose, he will be complete [or: he will learn], and he will guard the truth.” In other words, beyond the traits that directly affect learning, a student needs a refined personality in order to succeed.

Pinchas Kehati suggests a more direct link between a good heart and scholastic success: “One whose heart is free of jealousy and anger will have a broad heart to receive Torah.”

Rena adds that a generous heart may help by enabling the student to learn from other people. Instead of selfishly refusing to allow others the floor, the generous student is eager to hear what they have to say.

The reverse may also be true; a generous student is willing to share her knowledge with her peers. Rather than keep her insights to herself, the generous student seeks to be part of a team that grows collectively. Not only does she benefit others, but she benefits in return as well.

23 אמונת חכמים Trusting the Sages

HEART

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explains this trait as it sounds, emphasizing trust in the sages. He declares that one dare not be foolish, believing all that she is told, but she must have faith in the words of the sages even when she does not grasp their meaning.

Trust in our sages is important not only for religious success, but also for scholastic success. A student who is worried that our sages might be misleading her will read their lessons with one eye on the door, so to speak, and without the ability to immerse herself in them.

Of course, one might counter that a healthy skepticism can help provide an objective read and alert the student to inconsistencies - but this list is not approaching Torah with that perspective. The goal of this list is for the student to achieve mastery, and this trait contends that true mastery requires that the student immerse herself in the system wholeheartedly.

Fascinatingly, Rabbeinu Bechayye turns this trait around, portraying the successful student as the sage. This trait is not about trusting others; rather, it is about deserving the trust of others. He writes, “One must be identical inside and outside, and he should not display humility with arrogance beneath, and he should not display piety with flaws beneath. He should guard the paths of knowledge and its proper expression ... and he should not pretend to wisdom ...”

24 קבלת יסורים Accepting Suffering

HEART

There are many legitimate Jewish approaches to explain why a person suffers, but both Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explain that the successful student of Torah accepts suffering as a Divine decree, with a justification which may never be known by its victim. Further, Rabbeinu Bechayye adds that the successful student of Torah views suffering as a purifying experience, cleansing the student of any sin.

In the eighteenth trait (Reduced pleasure) we said that a student who would succeed in Torah should minimize her pursuit of pleasure, but the twenty-fourth trait adds to that trait in three significant ways:

- (1) Experiencing suffering involves a level of pain beyond that of abstaining from pleasure;
- (2) Experiencing suffering inflicted from the outside involves acceptance of an assault by G-d, as opposed to choosing suffering with one's freely exercised will;
- (3) The eighteenth trait spoke of conduct, but not attitude; one could abstain from pleasure begrudgingly and still check off that item from the list. In contrast, the twenty-fourth trait emphasizes *kabbalah*, acceptance of suffering.

The third distinction may explain how this trait aids study: a student who rails against hardship will be distracted by her battle against her condition. To succeed in Torah study, a student must be able to accept her state and shift her focus to her learning.

25 המכיר את מקומו Knowing One's Place

HEART

This trait is put into practice in the Sanhedrin, the supreme rabbinical court. As a mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:4) records, three rows of student scholars sit before the judges; each student scholar occupies a particular seat, based on his status among the others. As Rabbeinu Bechayye explains, a student must know her own level, and particularly her deficiencies.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz fleshes out this idea, explaining two benefits:

- (1) The student who knows her place will be humble, as we discussed regarding the eighth trait, and
- (2) The student who knows her place will be motivated to work hard, in order to grow and amass more wisdom.

Despite the above, the trait of knowing one's place is about more than humility; otherwise, it would be mere repetition of the eighth trait. What is added here?

- (1) Perhaps this trait is not about personal humility, but about respect for one's peers. Recognizing our own deficiencies is insufficient; we must also admire the strengths of those around us, the better to learn from them.
- (2) We might also note that "knowing one's place" includes not underestimating one's self. One who thinks she knows more than she does is apt to take the words of others less seriously, but one who does not recognize her own standing will fail to live up to her potential.

26 השמה בחלקו Happy with One's Lot

HEART

Pirkei Avot (4:1) declares that one who is happy with her lot is truly wealthy, but how does this trait contribute to scholastic success?

Rabbeinu Bechayye presents an “accept your lot” understanding of this trait. As we saw regarding the eighteenth trait (Reduced pleasure), a student who does not desire more than necessary will be able to focus on service of G-d and growth in her studies. On the other hand, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz stresses happiness; as we saw regarding the ninth trait (Joy), a student’s mood affects her learning. He writes, “Nothing damages sharpness, memory and diligence like sadness and worry.” On the positive side, “With a perpetually happy heart, one will understand and remember to a greater extent.”

Continuing Rabbi Lipschitz’s emphasis upon mood, we might see here a significant step beyond previous traits. The eighteenth trait emphasized reduced pleasure, in which one does not seek greater enjoyment. The twenty-fourth trait added acceptance of suffering, in which a student recognizes that her lot is decreed by G-d. Here, though, more is prescribed: the student should actually develop happiness with her lot.

Realistically, many people may be unable to fill this prescription, but it is important to realize that the list of traits is not a list of obligatory mitzvot. Rather, these are traits which enable a student to succeed in learning. A student who is able to achieve this lofty level of being happy with all she encounters will, indeed, be free of frustration and preoccupation and find great success.

27 העושה סיג לדבריו

Setting Personal Boundaries

HEART / CONDUCT

In our introduction, we noted that the list of 48 traits could be divided into four categories, but this trait belongs to multiple categories. As explained by the commentators, this trait prescribes an internal attitude, but it has immediate practical applications in the student's conduct.

The title of the trait is open to at least three interpretation, hinging on how one translates the Hebrew word *devarav*.

- (1) *Devarav* may refer to one's speech, so that this trait prescribes boundaries for the student's words. It is easy to slip into speech that is harmful to others, or that misrepresents truth, or that is self-serving, and so a student ought to guard her words.
- (2) Rabbeinu Bechayye broadens *devarav* to refer to general conduct, and he emphasizes that this trait is uniquely important for a successful student of Torah. The student represents Torah, and her words and actions convey Torah to others. Therefore, she must guard her actions and words, even refraining from that which is permitted, lest she accidentally lead others astray.
- (3) We might also translate *devarav* as "one's affairs". [See Tehillim 112:5.] We protect our Torah by setting boundaries for our involvement in other pursuits. As we said regarding the twentieth trait (Reduced socializing), success in Torah study requires that we shun distractions and focus on scholarship.

28 אינו מחזיק טובה לעצמו Does Not Inflate Himself

HEART

The Hebrew term *machazik tovah* may be rendered as “viewing one’s self as good,” or as “viewing one’s self as deserving reward.” The former approach takes *tovah* to refer to the student; the latter explains *tovah* as reward.

Rabbeinu Bechayye takes the first approach, viewing this trait as teaching the student not to think of herself as good because she studies Torah. As Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai says (Avot 2:8), “If you have learned a lot of Torah, do not think of yourself as good; for this you were created.”

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz appears to take the second approach: one who learns Torah with the perspective that she is earning reward cheapens the act of studying the words of G-d. One who buys flowers or a gift for a spouse with reward in mind is hardly doing so selflessly, for the sake of the spouse. Instead, it is a selfish deed, performed with one’s own gratification in mind. In the context of our list, this attitude damages the very meaning of Torah study.

Taking Rabbi Lipschitz’s approach a step further, anticipating reward is also damaging to the practical study of Torah. It is natural for us to anticipate reward for good behaviour, given that the Torah promises it. However, one who works with a mindset of “I will be paid for this” is vulnerable to doubt and weakness when she does not perceive adequate and timely compensation.

29 אהוב Beloved

HEART

Our list, in the midst of an attitude-centred series, presents a set of five traits which involve love. The latter four traits speak of what the student of Torah should love, but the first trait stresses that the successful student of Torah is beloved to others.

As noted by Pinchas Kehati, this trait teaches that we can earn the love of others, and that this is our responsibility as students of Torah. As the Talmud (Yoma 86a) instructs, “You shall cause the Name of Heaven to be beloved, via your actions. You should read and study and serve sages, and your interaction with others should be gentle. What will people say of such a person? ‘Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah, fortunate is his mentor who taught him Torah. Woe to those who have not studied Torah. He studied Torah, and see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds!’ Regarding him it is written, ‘And He said to me: You are My servant, Israel, from whom I will be glorified.’”

With a different approach, Rabbi Eliezer Levi contends that this trait emphasizes earning love from G-d. He points to Pirkei Avot 6:1, in which we are told that one who studies Torah for the pure purpose of satisfying G-d's expectations is "beloved" to G-d. The student should learn Torah for the sake of satisfying Divine expectations, and so become beloved to G-d.

30/31 אוהב את המקום ואת הבריות Loving G-d and Man

HEART

We link these two traits not in order to equate G-d and Man, and not to equate the passion one should feel toward G-d and toward Man, but to speak of the impact of love, on multiple levels.

As Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz writes, love - of G-d and of Man - comes about when one gains intimate knowledge of another, and is inspired to draw closer. In the thirtieth trait, the student who loves G-d learns G-d's ways. In the thirty-first trait, the student who loves other people recognizes and feels their joy and their sadness, and draws close to them in empathy.

We might add that love causes us to surpass expectations; one who is in love does not perform the minimum, but instead seeks creative ways to find favour. This sort of approach, applied toward G-d, will lead to success in Torah study. Applied toward our fellow human beings, this loving approach will lead us to build stronger connections and grow together in our studies.

On a deeper level, one who loves G-d and Man registers a greater appreciation for the Torah's emphasis upon our relationships with both G-d and humanity. We might imagine a student questioning why G-d cares about her actions, or why the Torah presents the many mitzvot of social interaction and takes pains to depict the lives of individuals from generations past. Only one who loves G-d and Man, who seeks a bond with the Creator and who is capable of embracing other human beings, will comprehend the Torah's message.

היום שלשים יום שהם ארבעה שבועות ושני ימים לעומר.
היום אחד ושלשים יום שהם ארבעה שבועות ושלשה ימים לעומר.

32 אוהב את התוכחות Love to be Educated

HEART

We have translated the Hebrew word *tochachah* as *education*, rather than the more conventional *rebuke*. It may also be translated as *demonstration*. *Tochachah* is often used in the context of harsh rebuke, but we believe these other translations reflect the etymology of the word, as seen in Bereishit 31:42.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz understands this trait conventionally: A student who receives instruction should be happy for the opportunity to grow.

This trait incorporates the eighth trait (humility) and the twenty-fifth trait (knowing one's place), but it adds the dimension of love. As we cited from Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz regarding the thirtieth trait, love connects two parties. Here, love connects the student with the lesson, causing the student to seek it actively.

Loving education is not only about refining one's personality through instruction; this trait also makes a direct impact on one's Torah study. This student is open to having her mind changed about a particular approach to a text or an idea. Those whose minds are dominated by their first impressions are at a distinct disadvantage in the realm of serious scholarship.

Rabbeinu Bechayye seems to interpret love of *tochachah* in a different way, as a symptom of a student's success. He writes, "One who loves to be educated is wise; as Mishlei 9:8 says, 'Educate a sage, and he will love you.'" We might suggest that education leads to wisdom, which leads to more education.

33 אוהב את המישרים Love the Straight

HEART / MIND

Rabbeinu Bechayye sees in this trait a message to the student regarding identifying with the values of the Torah. The Torah rejects corruption, and the successful student must feel the same abhorrence for injustice.

As we said in the eighth and twenty-second traits, a refined personality is necessary in order for one to succeed in Torah study. One of the hallmarks of a refined Torah personality is its rejection of dishonesty and injustice.

More, the Torah is replete with laws emphasizing a commitment to justice; in numerous examples, G-d “signs” these laws with a concluding, “I am HaShem,” declaring that these laws are central to the Divine vision. In that light, this final “love” trait teaches us that the student who would achieve insight into the true nature of Torah must nurture within herself a love of justice.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz takes this trait in a more intellectual direction, explaining it as a mechanism of successful Torah study. The student must avoid “crooked” thinking, like the self-justifying rationalization. [Rabbi Lipschitz is influenced by the fact that his list includes a separate trait of loving *tzedakot*, which he explains as a broader love of justice.]

34 מתרחק מן הכבוד Avoid Honour

HEART

This trait begins a series of three traits which involve rejecting the authority that comes with excellence in scholarship; the first in the series instructs the student to actively avoid accolades.

Rabbeinu Bechayye contends that any honour we receive for studying Torah is really misdirected; this honour should be addressed to G-d, who grants us the Torah. Approaching from a different angle, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz contends that a human being who lives up to our list of traits is, indeed, worthy of honour. However, such a student also knows her own flaws, and therefore she rejects honour and avoids the spotlight.

In addition to the humility implied by the above explanations, we see four benefits in rejecting honour:

- (1) A student who does not think highly of herself is more apt to listen to others' ideas;
- (2) A student who is motivated by honour looks for ideas which appeal to her "fans", rather than produce legitimate scholarship;
- (3) Honour is fickle and fleeting, and a student who thrives on honour will inevitably be frustrated in the search for sufficient tribute. She will then abandon Torah study in an attempt to find a more rewarding pursuit;
- (4) Shunning honour enables a student to preserve time, energy and focus for Torah study. Others may be obligated to honour her, but she will benefit when she politely avoids accepting it.

35 ולא מגיס לבו בתלמודו Avoid Arrogance in Learning

HEART

The previous trait warned the student to avoid honour from others; as Rabbeinu Bechayye explains, this trait instructs the student not to tell herself that she deserves honour. A sense of accomplishment is healthy, but the student who allows herself to fall into arrogance will delude herself into thinking she has achieved all she must accomplish.

Further, arrogance is often a means of compensating for insecurity; human beings may feel a need to inflate their standing in order to combat their own fears of unworthiness. A more healthy and productive way for a student to deal with her self-doubt is to increase her efforts toward worthy ends.

Along the same lines, Rena notes that one who is arrogant often feels a need to convince other people of her greatness. The result is an unhappy, self-destructive spiral, in which the arrogant person demonstrates to the world why she is unworthy of their respect, and the honour she seeks flees from her.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz understands this trait differently, translating the Hebrew word *gas* as “familiar and coarse.” As he explains it, a successful student of Torah, for all of the hours she has spent in study, does not lose reverence for the subject matter she is learning. [See traits six and seven, as well.]

36 ואינו שמח בהוראה

Do Not Seek Satisfaction in Issuing Halachic Rulings

HEART

Our list has already warned the student to avoid honour from others and from herself, but another danger remains. Success in study brings communal standing, and with that comes the opportunity to instruct others in proper conduct. Per the Talmud (Sotah 22a-b), the student who is capable of instructing is obligated to do so, but with this obligation comes a responsibility to avoid arrogance.

On a related note, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz contends that one who reaches the stage of issuing legal rulings should recognize that errors are always near to hand. The possibility of accidentally misleading others should be a sobering source of concern and an obstacle to arrogance.

We could understand this trait as speaking only to the general deficiency inherent in arrogance. However, this trait is present in a list of traits which aid study, because it also addresses a concern regarding proper scholarship. A student who takes pleasure from instructing others runs the risk of glossing over the hard work needed to truly understand the rabbinic debates which lie behind the law. The result is a superficial understanding which is not up to the task of analyzing new situations and producing correct rulings. For the purpose of our list, this superficiality will also lead to deficient Torah study.

37 נושא בעול עם חבירו

Share the Burden of Others

COMMUNITY / CONDUCT

This trait is the first in a four-part sequence addressing both Conduct and Community, outlining how the student of Torah should relate to people around her.

In his preface to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin's *Nefesh haChaim*, Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin, son of Rabbi Chaim, writes, "My father always used to rebuke me, as he saw that I would not take part in the pain of others. This is what he always told me: 'This is a person's entire purpose. A person is not created for himself. A person is created only to benefit others, with whatever power is in his possession.'" Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz both see Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin's message in this trait; the student of Torah should not be so locked into her scholarship that she neglects the pain of others. Rabbi Lipschitz stresses that this extends into every realm of life: "Whether in physical effort, financial expenditure or emotional pain for that which befalls another, or when another lacks anything temporary or eternal, he should not hesitate to extend himself to offer counsel, to educate, for the other's good in this world and in the next."

The twentieth trait (Reduced socializing) warned that social interaction reduces the student's focus on Torah. However, perhaps the refined character of a student who helps others is better-suited to comprehend Torah. Alternatively, we may suggest that the student who expends effort to aid another will learn a great deal in the process.

מכריעו לכה זכות 38 Tip Their Scale to Merit

COMMUNITY / CONDUCT

As Rabbeinu Bechayye explains, the message of this trait is to judge others favourably. When a person's general behaviour is proper, but then we observe questionable conduct, we should assume the most positive explanation for their actions. [In a separate context, the Talmud warns that this presumption of innocence should not be permitted to endanger ourselves, or others. See Niddah 61a.]

We might suggest that this trait is important in shaping the refined personality which is suited to study Torah, as we have seen regarding other traits on the list. However, there may be a way to understand this trait as assisting directly in scholarship. A student who suspects others of general wrongdoing, or of failing to comprehend the topic they are studying, will not be able to learn from their questions or their point of view. A student who trains herself to assume the best of others, seeking truth and value in their statements, will be open to learning from them, and will therefore have an advantage in her studies.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz offers an additional explanation for this trait: "Tip their scale to merit" may mean to help others to make proper decisions. When we observe that another person is having difficulty deciding between proper and improper paths, we should help her choose the proper path.

39/40 מעמידו על האמת והשלום Lead Them to Truth and Peace

COMMUNITY / CONDUCT

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz sees in these traits a drive to help one's friend learn Torah. The successful student is responsible to help others to find truth in the lessons of Torah. Further, she is expected to help others toward a complete conception of G-d, a *shleimut* (completeness) which will bring them to *shalom* (peace).

Alternatively, both Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz suggest that these traits could describe the relationship between two students of Torah. There should be honesty and peace between Torah scholars, and achieving this state will enable them to strive, as a unit, toward greater comprehension of Torah.

This, perhaps, was the bond between Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and Reish Lakish, whose love for each other grew through the honesty of their disagreements as well as the peace of their friendship. (Bava Metzia 84a) Indeed, the Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) describes two Torah scholars locked in debate as enemies, until they resolve their disagreement and return to loving each other.

Along these lines, Pinchas Kehati adds a practical note. When engaging in scholarly debate, or in trying to show another a proper path, a student might cause her friend to question her motives and see in her actions a demonstration of arrogance or hostility. Our list of traits stresses that even as we lead others to truth, we must also ensure that we preserve the peace of our relationships.

היום תשעה ושלשים יום שהם חמשה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעומר.
היום ארבעים יום שהם חמשה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעומר.

41 מתיישב לבו בתלמודו A Settled Mind in Learning

MIND

Our list began with a series of education-centred traits, and it concludes with another series that stresses aspects of successful study. However, the first trait in this set seems redundant, for the thirteenth trait was *yishuv*, or “settling”. What is the difference between the two?

Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explained the thirteenth trait as addressing the student with advice for study. Here, they focus on other areas: judging and teaching.

Rabbeinu Bechayye suggests that the message here is regarding deciding law; one should be patient in reaching a verdict, and this will enable a stronger understanding of the issues at hand. This is reminiscent of the advice of the *Anshei Knesset haGedolah* (the Great Assembly), which led the Jewish people at the start of the Second Temple period. As recorded in Pirkei Avot 1:1, they taught judges to be patient in adjudicating disputes, both for the sake of better handling of the case at hand and for the sake of avoiding setting an improper precedent with a mistaken ruling.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz explains the Hebrew *talmudo* as “his teaching”. Before teaching, one must first settle her mind; this will enable her to arrange the lesson properly, and to present it in a way that will help the students learn. [See the third trait: Arrangement of the lips.]

42 שואל ומשיב Asks and Responds

MIND

Both Rabbeinu Bechayye and Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz see in this trait an instruction to the student to maintain humility, but in different ways:

- Rabbeinu Bechayye is concerned about a student who fears losing face in the eyes of others. Such a student might refuse to ask questions, lest she be perceived as ignorant. Such a student might refuse to answer the questions of those she considers beneath her. The proper student will ask of all, and respond to all, and so she will learn.
- Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz is concerned regarding the way in which one asks and answers. An arrogant student might ask questions in order to put her acumen on display, and might answer questions in a way that demonstrates sharp wit, but without concern for whether the answer is correct. Both of these behaviours are beneath the successful student, and are detrimental to creating a proper environment for learning.

We might also see in this trait the importance of a serious approach to study:

- Ask: Due to lack of time, lack of easy access to a teacher, lack of comfort in exposing our ignorance, or lack of interest, we might accept an insufficient understanding. If our goal is to understand poorly, then we have achieved our goal. But if our goal is to learn, then we defeat ourselves.
- Respond: It is possible to raise questions and not answer them, instead moving on to the next topic. This style is sometimes termed *bekiut* (broad knowledge), but the term *shitchi* (superficial) is often more appropriate. Taking questions seriously is an important step in growing in our studies.

43 שומע ומוסיף Listens and Adds

MIND / COMMUNITY

According to Rabbeinu Bechayye, the trait of listening and adding describes the conduct of an ideal student when learning in a group setting. Like a candle which catches fire from another source, but then adds to the flame from its own fuel, so a successful student learns from others and adds from her store of knowledge and her analytical skill.

We might offer another way in which this could be the trait of a successful student. It is normal for a scholar to develop an idea and become so enamoured of it that she refuses to consider any other approach. However, a student who falls into this trap stunts her own growth, preventing herself from absorbing other perspectives. Regarding this, our list says that a student should listen to others, and add their ideas to her arsenal. [Similarly, see Rena's comment in the thirty-fifth trait: Avoid arrogance in learning.]

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz understands this trait differently, as describing the ideal teacher a student ought to seek. The instructor listens patiently to the words of each student, taking them into consideration regardless of the student's status. When the teacher sees that more explanation is needed, then the teacher expands as required.

44/45 לומד על מנת ללמד ולעשות

Learn in order to teach, Learn in order to practice

MIND / HEART

These two traits address not only scholarship but motivation, teaching that the successful student is not motivated by intellectual curiosity alone. In order to fully acquire Torah, one must also approach study with the goal of teaching others, and of putting these lessons into practice.

Learning for the sake of teaching and practicing adds at least three benefits:

- (1) According to Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz, the student who intends to teach and to practice will invest greater effort in comprehending and remembering the Torah she learns. The ideal level is achieved when learning in order to practice, but regarding certain lessons which have no practical application, one should learn in order to teach.
- (2) One who studies for the sake of satisfying a personal thirst for knowledge will emphasize the areas and questions that catch her interest. One who intends to teach must ask herself what will interest others, and one who intends to practice must make certain that she grasps the aspects that relate to implementation.
- (3) Rena notes that one who follows through, learning and teaching and practicing, will have a more robust learning experience because of the multiple ways that she will process the information.

המחכים את רבו והמכון את שמועתו

46/47 Makes his Mentor Wise and Resolves his Lessons

MIND / COMMUNITY

The final three traits speak of the relationship of the successful student with her teacher. This set brings us full-circle; we began the list of forty-eight traits with the importance of learning from a teacher, and now we conclude with a guide to how that learning should take place.

The first of these traits is that the successful student enlightens her mentor:

- Rabbeinu Bechayye explains that through questions and analysis, the student makes the mentor sharper, and the student then benefits by studying under a more advanced instructor.
- On the other hand, Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz suggests that this trait may not actually be about enlightening one's mentor; rather, it may be about seeing one's mentor as enlightened. When a student matures and reflects on the lessons taught by her mentor, she might notice apparent flaws in the ideas she had absorbed years earlier. The successful student will not reject those ideas, but will begin with the assumption that her mentor was wise, and attempt to find the logic behind the mentor's teachings.

The second trait, as explained by Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz, is related to the first. The former trait advises the student regarding cases in which the teacher's lessons come under challenge; the latter trait deals with occasions when the teacher's lessons seem to contradict each other. Here, too, the student is called upon to challenge, resolve, and gain greater understanding.

היום ששה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעומר.
היום שבעה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעומר.

48 אומר דבר בשם אומרו

Citing the Source

MIND / COMMUNITY

On a simple level, this final trait requires that the student cite her sources, and this might be understood as a warning against plagiarism. However, commentators see deeper lessons here.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz contends that this trait requires that the student cite her mentor respectfully. Lest the student who has achieved success forget her origins and how she arrived at this point, respectful citation will remind her of her roots.

Pinchas Kehati sees in citation an unspecified benefit to study itself. He cites a midrash (Kohelet Rabbah 2), “Should a student fail to report his lessons in the name of his teacher, tomorrow his Torah will be forgotten.”

Finally, it is evident that tracking attribution of ideas will aid in organizing data, which is an important step in ensuring retention. (http://www.sc-boces.org/english/IMC/Focus/Memory_strategies2.pdf) The student who aims for success should not be frustrated by the need to catalogue additional pieces of information; the clarity that comes with this enhanced structure will ensure that she remembers the rest well.

49

Congratulations upon completing the forty-nine days of the Omer!

As we complete the list of forty-eight traits, we realize that there is a significant, overarching lesson in what it chooses not to emphasize. At least seven traits aim to teach the student about how she should relate to other people. No fewer than eleven traits emphasize the importance of humility. A minimum of a dozen traits stress the importance of dedication and focus. Comparatively few speak about the act of study itself. We might suggest that study is a means of acquiring information, but good character is the way we acquire the Torah of G-d.

Alternatively, we might look at the context for this lesson in Pirkei Avot. Immediately before our list of forty-eight traits, we are taught that monarchy is acquired via thirty levels, which are laws defining a king's authority, and that *kehunah* (priesthood) is acquired via twenty-four levels, which are the gifts presented to *kohanim*. These lists speak not of how one becomes a king or kohen, but of that which defines the king and kohen in the eyes of the nation. In that light, perhaps the list of forty-eight traits is less about a means of learning Torah, and more about that which defines a Torah scholar in the eyes of the world.

May all of us merit to grow in our Torah study, developing our Minds, Hearts and Conduct, and participating in a genuine Community of Study;
May we find these forty-eight traits within ourselves; and
May we accept the Torah with a full heart this Shavuot.

