

Beit Hillel/Beit Shammai Smackdown | Class 2

Congregation Beth Shalom

Source Sheet by Rabbi David Chapman

Hillel – Hillel, referred to as the Elder due to his position in the Sanhedrin, was born in Babylonia and lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman Emperor Augustus, about a hundred years before the destruction of the Second Temple. He and his colleague Shammai were the last of the *zugot*, the pairs of *tanna'im* who played a role in establishing the Mishna. Although Hillel and Shammai established two distinct schools, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, and their disciples were involved in many controversies, **Hillel and Shammai themselves disagreed only with regard to three or four cases. The real difference between them was one of character.** Hillel was a calm and gentle individual who avoided conflict whenever possible, whereas Shammai was stern and uncompromising. When approached by a potential convert whom Shammai had rejected because he wished to learn the entire Torah on one leg, Hillel offered him the maxim: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah, and the rest is its interpretation; go and learn. According to tradition, Hillel arrived in Eretz Yisrael to study at age forty in a state of poverty, but his perseverance brought him to the attention of Shemaya and Avtalyon, the heads of the academy, who welcomed him into the study hall. Ultimately, serving those scholars allowed him to settle questions whose solutions were unknown to others, and he was appointed head of the Sanhedrin. The Gemara compares Hillel to Ezra the Scribe, crediting him with reestablishing Torah at a period in history when it was being forgotten (Sukka 20a).

Pirkei Avot 2:4-7

(4) ... Hillel said: do not separate yourself from the community, Do not trust in yourself until the day of your death, Do not judge your fellow until you have reached her place. Do not say something that cannot be

משנה אבות ב':ד'-ז'

(ד) ... הָלֵל אָמַר, אֵל תִּפְרָשׁ מִן הַצְּבוּר, וְאֵל תִּאֲמִין בְּעַצְמְךָ עַד יוֹם מוֹתְךָ, וְאֵל תִּדְּוִן אֶת חֵבְרֶךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמְקוֹמוֹ, וְאֵל תֹּאמַר דְּבַר שְׂאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְשִׁמְעַ, שְׂסוּפוּ לְהִשְׁמַע.

understood [trusting] that in the end it will be understood. Say not: 'when I shall have leisure I shall study;' perhaps you will not have leisure.

(5) Hillel used to say: A brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. In a place where there are no men (decent people), strive to be a man (decent person).

(6) Moreover Hillel saw a skull floating on the face of the water. He said to it: because you drowned others, they drowned you. And in the end, they that drowned you will be drowned.

(7) He used to say: The more flesh, the more worms; The more property, the more anxiety; The more women, the more witchcraft; The more maidservants, the more lewdness; The more manservants, the more robbery;

[But] the more Torah, the more life; The more sitting [in the company of scholars], the more wisdom; The more counsel, the more understanding; The more charity, the more peace. If one acquires a good name, she has acquired something for herself;

וְאֵל תֹּאמַר לְכַשְׂאִפְנֵה אֲשֶׁנָּה, שְׂמָא לֹא תִפְנֶה:

(ה) הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵין בּוֹר יָרָא חֲטָא, וְלֹא עִם הָאָרֶץ חָסִיד, וְלֹא הַבֵּישָׁן לְמִדָּה, וְלֹא הַקִּפְדָּן מִלְּמִדָּה, וְלֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסַחֲוֹרָה מִחֲכָיִים. וּבְמִקּוּם שְׂאִין אֲנָשִׁים, הַשְׁתִּידֵל לְהִיּוֹת אִישׁ:

(ו) אִף הוּא הָיָה רְאָה גְלִגְלַת אַחַת שְׂצָפָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. אָמַר לָהּ, עַל דְּאִטְפַת, אִטְפוּךְ. וְסוּף מְטִיפְךָ יִטּוּפוּן:

(ז) הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, מְרַבֵּה בְּשָׂר, מְרַבֵּה רְמָה. מְרַבֵּה נְכָסִים, מְרַבֵּה דְאָגָה. מְרַבֵּה נָשִׁים, מְרַבֵּה כְּשָׁפִים. מְרַבֵּה שְׂפָחוֹת, מְרַבֵּה זָמָה. מְרַבֵּה עֲבָדִים, מְרַבֵּה גְזֹל.

מְרַבֵּה תוֹרָה, מְרַבֵּה חַיִּים. מְרַבֵּה יְשִׁיבָה, מְרַבֵּה חֲכָמָה. מְרַבֵּה עֲצָה, מְרַבֵּה תְבוּנָה. מְרַבֵּה צְדָקָה, מְרַבֵּה שְׁלוֹם. קָנָה שֵׁם טוֹב, קָנָה לְעֵצְמוֹ. קָנָה לוֹ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה, קָנָה לוֹ חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

If one acquires for himself knowledge of Torah, he has acquired life in the world to come.