

# **Torah Lishmah - the most radical Jewish concept of all**

Presented by Matt Plen – [matt@masorti.org.uk](mailto:matt@masorti.org.uk)

## **1. Making (*poiesis*) and acting (*praxis*) – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (6:5)**

**[M]aking and acting are different** ... so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make. Hence too they are not included one in the other; for neither is acting making, nor is making acting....

All **art** is concerned with coming into being, i.e. with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made....

Now it is thought to be the mark of a man of **practical wisdom** to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the **good life in general**.

This is shown by the fact that we credit men with practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well with a view to some good end which is one of those that are **not the object of any art**....

Now no one deliberates about things that are invariable, nor about things that it is impossible for him to do.... [P]ractical wisdom cannot [therefore] be scientific knowledge nor art; not science because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds of thing.

The remaining alternative, then, is that [practical wisdom] is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man. **For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end.**

## 2. *Lishmah* and not-*lishmah* – The Shema

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut 6:5)

וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁמַעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאֶהְבָּה אֶת־  
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם: וְנָתַתִּי מְטֶר־אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה  
וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּתְּ דָגְיָךְ וְתִירְשָׁךְ וַיִּצְהַרְךָ: וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לַבְהֵמָתְךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ  
וְשָׂבַעְתָּ: הַשְּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתֶם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: וְחָרָה אַף־ה' בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מְטֶר  
וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאִבַּדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן  
לָכֶם:

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil— I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle— and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the LORD's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the LORD is assigning to you. (Deut 11:13-17)

### **3. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, 'The reading of Shema' (1981)**

A man may love himself, a woman, wealth, or honor. He loves his country and may love cake topped with whipped cream: anything he senses, conceives, or imagines. Is it appropriate to apply the human category of "love" to man's relation to that which is not given in sensation, conception, or imagination? Seeing it as a human phenomenon, we are capable of understanding a pagan's love for his idols, which he can envisage with his senses. We can also understand the love of a Christian for his lord, who is a human figure. But how can one love God who is not conceivable in terms of any attributes and is analogous to nothing whatsoever?

The unintelligible verse "and you shall love the Lord your God" is elucidated through its sequel: "And these words which I command you this day should be in your heart." The acceptance of the yoke of Torah and Mitzvoth is the love of God, and it is this that constitutes faith in God.

This must be explicitly stated in order to remove the error afflicting the naive (or those who feign naïveté), who contend that one can separate faith from religion; that faith is one thing, and religion, in the sense of the institutional system of Torah and Mitzvoth, another; that, when faith and religion appear together, adherence to Torah and Mitzvoth is a kind of superstructure built upon faith; and that there could be a belief in God unaccompanied by the observance of the commandments.

#### 4. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 10:5*

כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה בְּדִי לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר אוֹ בְּדִי שְׂלֵא תִגִּיעַ עָלָיו פְּרַעְנוֹת הַרִי זֶה עוֹסֵק  
שְׂלֵא לְשִׁמָּה. וְכָל הָעוֹסֵק בָּהּ לֹא לִירְאָה וְלֹא לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר אֲלֵא מִפְּנֵי אֲהֵבַת אֲדוֹן  
כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂצוּיָה בָּהּ הַרִי זֶה עוֹסֵק בָּהּ לְשִׁמָּה. וְאָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים לְעוֹלָם יַעֲסֹק אָדָם  
בְּתוֹרָה וְאַפְלוּ שְׂלֵא לְשִׁמָּה שְׂמִתּוֹךְ שְׂלֵא לְשִׁמָּה בָּא לְשִׁמָּה. לְפִיכֹךְ כְּשֶׁמְלַמְדִין  
אֶת הַקְּטָנִים וְאֶת הַנְּשִׂים וְכֻלָּל עַמֵי הָאָרֶץ אֵין מְלַמְדִין אוֹתָן אֲלֵא לְעַבֵד מִירְאָה  
וּבְדִי לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר, עַד שֶׁתִּרְבֶּה דַעְתָּן וְיִתְחַכְּמוּ חֲכָמָה יִתְרֶה מְגִלִים לָהֶם רַחֲמֵי  
מְעַט מְעַט וּמְרַגְלִין אוֹתָן לְעַנְן זֶה בְּנַחַת עַד שֶׁיִּשְׁיִיגוּהוּ וְיִדְעוּהוּ וְיַעֲבֹדוּהוּ  
מֵאַהֲבָה:

Anyone who engages in Torah in order to receive a reward, or so that misfortune will not befall him, engages in Torah not for its own sake (*lo lishmah*); but anyone who engages in it not from Fear and not from a desire to receive reward – he engages in it for its own sake (*lishmah*).

Our sages taught: A person should certainly engage in Torah even not for its own sake, since engagement not for its own sake leads to engagement for its own sake. Therefore when we teach children and women and generally ignorant people – we only teach them to serve out of Fear and in order to receive a reward.

Once their understanding deepens and they gain additional wisdom, then we reveal this secret to them little by little and accustom them to this concept gently until they grasp and understand and serve God through Love.