

### Pirkei Avos – The 5 Students

Sponsored by Jake and Karen Abilevitz in memory of Jake's Beloved Parents, ז"ל & לאה בת אברהם ז"ל, יהושע בן שמעון דב ז"ל and Karen's brother

- **Mishnah 8.** Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai received [the oral tradition] from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say: if thou hast learnt much Torah, do not claim credit unto thyself, because for such [purpose] wast thou created.
- Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai had five disciples and they were:
  - r. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus,
  - r. Joshua b. Hananiah,
  - r. Jose, the priest,
  - r. Simeon b. Nethaneel
  - and r. Eleazar b. 'arach.
    - He used to recount their [foremost] qualities
      - r. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern which loses not a drop
      - r. Joshua b. Hananiah - happy is she that bare him;
      - r. Jose, the priest, is a pious man;
      - r. Simeon b. Nethaneel is one that fears sin,
      - and r. Eleazar b.'arach is like unto a spring that [ever] gathers force....
- **Mishnah 9.** He said unto them: go forth and observe which is the good way unto which a man should cleave?
  - R. Eliezer said, a good eye;
  - r. Joshua said, a good associate;
  - r. Jose said, a good neighbour;
  - r. Simeon said, one who looks [ahead to see] what [consequences] shall be brought forth [by his own actions].
  - r. Eleazar said, a good heart...
    - Said he unto them: I prefer the words of Eleazar b. 'Arach to your words, for within the comprehensive character of his words, are your words [included].

- **משנה ח-** רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי הוא היה אומר אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך כי לכך נוצרת
- חמשה תלמידים היו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי ואלו הן
  - רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס
  - ורבי יהושע בן חנניה
  - ורבי יוסי הכהן
  - ורבי שמעון בן נתנאל
  - ורבי אלעזר בן ערך
- הוא היה מונה שבחן
  - רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה
  - רבי יהושע אשרי יולדתו
  - רבי יוסי חסיד
  - רבי שמעון בן נתנאל ירא חטא
  - ורבי אלעזר בן ערך מעין המתגבר...
- **משנה ט -** אמר להם צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם
  - רבי אליעזר אומר עין טובה
  - רבי יהושע אומר חבר טוב
  - רבי יוסי אומר שכן טוב
  - רבי שמעון אומר הרואה את הנולד
  - רבי אלעזר אומר לב טוב
  - אמר להם רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך שבכלל דבריו דבריכם

NAME	PRAISE	STRAIGHT PATH
r. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus	plastered cistern which loses not a drop	a good eye
r. Joshua b. Hananiah	happy is she that bare him	a good friend
r. Jose, the priest	is a pious man	a good neighbor
r. Simeon b. Nethaneel	one that fears sin	one who looks [ahead to see] what [consequences] shall be brought forth [by his own actions]
r. Eleazar b. 'arach	is like unto a spring that [ever] gathers force	a good heart

Abarbanel (Compiled and translated by R' Abraham Chill)

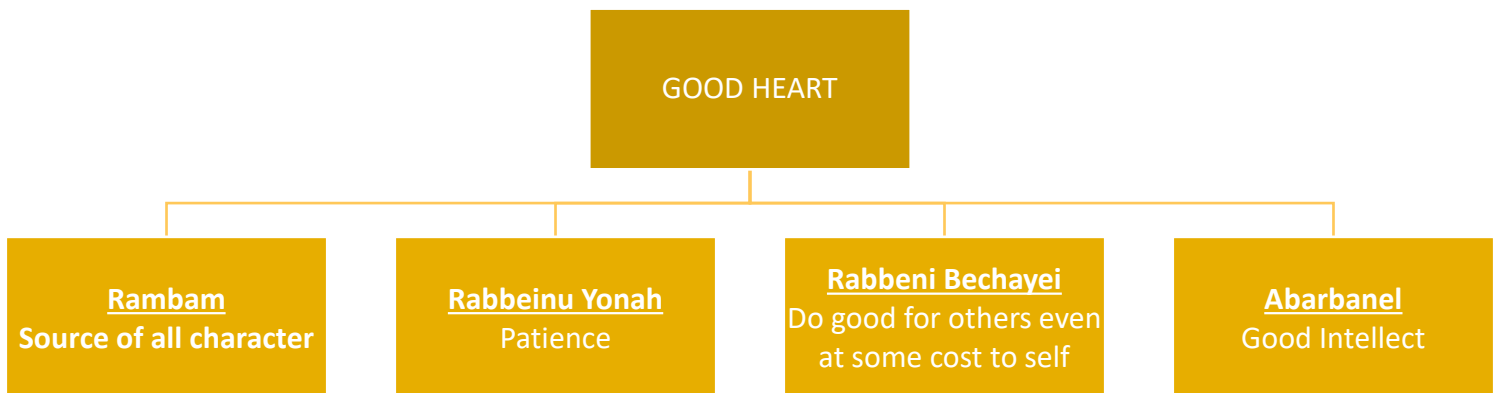
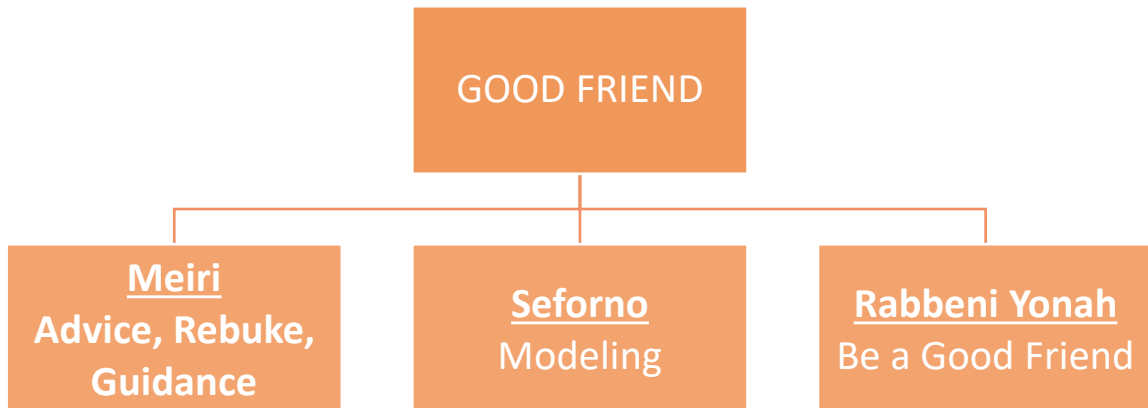
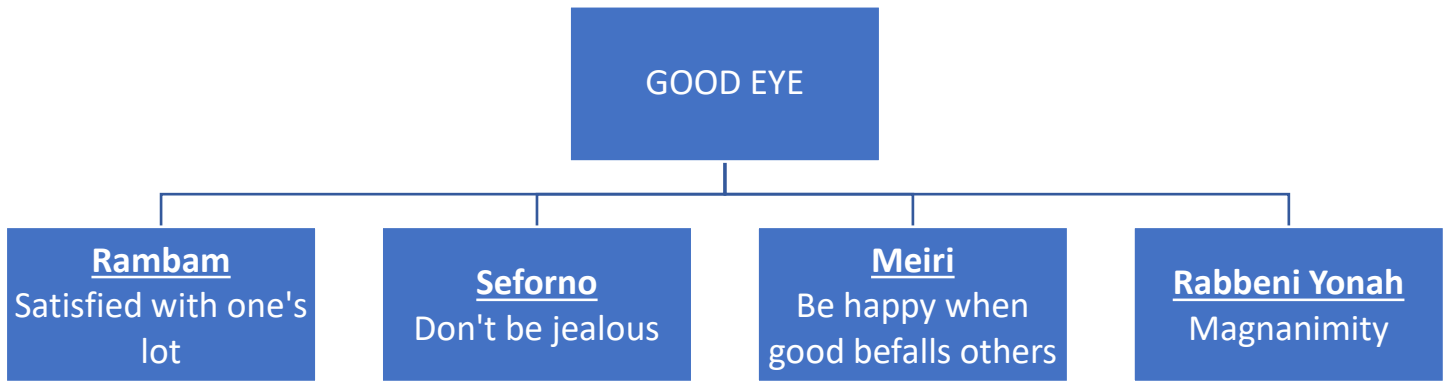
Firstly, he asked them, "Which is the *best* trait a person should acquire?" Rabbi Eliezer answered: a *good eye*. Abarbanel does not agree with Rambam who contends that a *good eye* means that its possessor is satisfied with what he has. Instead, he suggests an ingenious interpretation: All the pronouncements of the five disciples are contiguous to their personalities as viewed by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. In other words, Rabbi Eliezer was compared to a plastered cistern that does not leak or lose even a drop of water. Anything that is accumulated in that cistern is retained. It is logical, then, that Rabbi Eliezer would choose a *good eye* as the best asset a person can have. A good eye's field of vision will include everything within sight and will retain it. When a person is in need of certain information he will recall *all* he needs and not a selective, partial recollection because he is like a plastered cistern.

Rabbi Yehoshua was lauded with, "Happy is she who bore him." because he was such a lovable person. It is, therefore, natural that he would propose that being a *good friend* is the most important thing in life. A congenial person seeks out other congenial people as friends and acquaintances.

Rabbi Yosi was acclaimed by his master as a *hasid*. It was, therefore, natural that he should suggest that the attribute of neighborliness is an asset not to be ignored. It is of the *hasid's* character that his passionate will to do God's bidding can only be achieved within the collective of society. Lonesomeness and isolation have no place in hasidic life; good neighbors and good friends constitute the core of hasidic living.

Rabbi Shimon was described as one who fears sin. Knowing the consequences of sin and the severe punishment for transgressions it could be expected that Rabbi Shimon would pontificate that the best trait a person can have is to understand the consequences of his actions. Before speaking or doing something, one should think in terms of what will happen in its wake.

It was also inevitable that Rabbi Elazar, who was compared to an overflowing spring, should propose a *good heart* as the choicest human quality. When Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai compared him to an overflowing spring, he was referring to the unfathomable well of Torah learning. The heart, according to rabbinic tradition, is the source of all thought, knowledge and wisdom. A good heart is all that one needs.

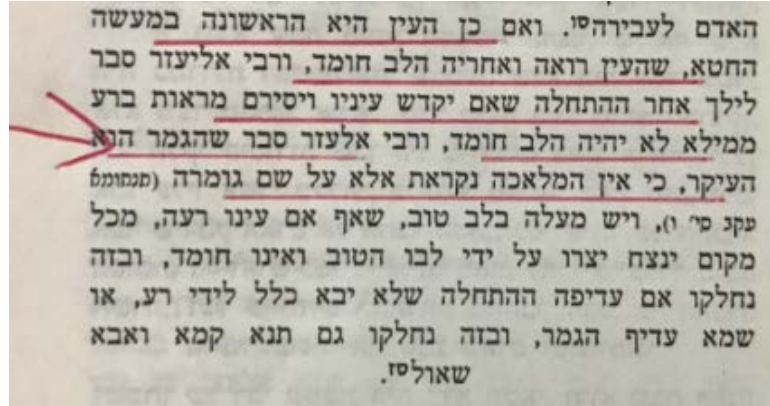


## EIV TOV vs. AYIN TOVA

### 1. TIFERES YISRAEL

פח) לב טוב. שלבו תמיד שמח ומזומן להיטיב לכל ועי"ז חדוותא מסתייע שיתחדד שכלו כמעין המתגבר [ונ"ל דלב טוב הוא מצד הגוף, שהתרגל כך עד שנעשה לו לטבע שני, משא"כ עין טובה, היינו שמתנהג במדות הטובות מכח השכל, ומחמת שרק ע"י השכל [יכריח יצור, אינו עושה הטוב בשמחה ובהשלמה כראוי [ועי' רמב"ם פ"ח מפרקיו

### 2. PISCHEI KAH



### 3. CHAZON ISH

Everyone agrees that a good heart is the good trait, which includes all the good traits that unite and become one complete whole, but the discussion is about the active means by which one can acquire a good heart, and telling a person to go out and acquire a good heart doesn't teach him anything about the means to achieve that desired goal.

Since the diseases of the spirit vary according to the variations of human nature, the Sages were provided with varying natures, each Sage possessing personal and unique talents. And so, the many therapies and ways of the various Sages, in accordance with the wisdom of each one of them, enable every person to find treatments for his bad traits. When the Sages

talked about the straight way that a person should choose, it was not a discussion aimed at reaching a dry verdict – "Do this" – but rather its intention was to diagnose the disease correctly and provide the proper remedy for it. This is the starting point, according to which the sage should lay out the ways to perfect one's morals, set a study program, arrange its chapters and present it to the public for study and review, so that they can review it constantly until they are cured. Each one of these Sages found in himself the capability of helping people perfect their traits in a different way, and he felt obligated to construct a system of moral teachings based on that point, which was to have a guaranteed effect – if not for all, then to many thousands of those whose disease responds to these sayings, and they were to find a cure for it in these teachings. Hashem gave of His wisdom to those who fear Him, and each one takes what is allotted to him. When R. Yochanan ben Zakkai spoke to his disciples, he said to them "Go out and find" – meaning, "Go out and compose a book of character traits."

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya found himself to be the one destined to appeal to the people with a pledge to acquire a good heart. This saying is the transmission of an entire school of thought to the people: to mend the heart, to enthuse the hearts so that they should search for the light of truth, to love eternal life and set aside the earthly, temporary life; to approach

the single good trait, which includes all good traits, without needing to break it down into parts. R. Yochanan ben Zakkai said to his disciples: "The words of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya are preferable to me [literally, "I see the words of R. Elazar ben Azarya"]." This "seeing" is the heart's delving into the depths of thought and understanding that part of the Torah that deals with morals and human nature. For Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai's part in this was the same as Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's: the direct approach to correction of the heart.