

What do the Mishnaic scholars do for enjoyment? For sure, they were human beings like us, and enjoyed many of the same things we do. However, the sages were devoted to the study of Torah. Today we struggle to find something in our lives that we enjoy. Some people like to read, some listen to music and still others like to commune with nature. To the sages of the Mishna, the study of Torah filled two distinct places in their lives. Clearly they viewed Torah study as a Mitzva from God in which every person is to engage. On top of that though, the sages enjoyed Torah study. It gave them the same feelings of joy and happiness that reading a great novel gives to a reader, that listening to a beautiful symphony gives to a music lover and that taking a long walk in a beautiful garden might give to a nature lover.

When you truly love the activity in which you are engaged, you never want it to stop. About the Torah it says in Pirki Avot “Ben Bag-Bag says, turn it over and over, everything is found in it.” The Sages would take every verse, every saying, and look at it in every way they thought possible in order to truly understand what the text was saying to them. If they were just going to fulfill the Mitzva, reading the verse might be enough. But to engage themselves in this way, shows their true love of the Torah.

Finally this section ends with the statement of praise. Though the word praise itself is not used here, blessing God is of the same idea. I have chosen not to translate the word *Makom* here. The word *Makom* literally means place. According to the sages God is the “Place of the world,” the entire world is contained in Him. This prayer is often mistakenly placed with the text that is to come next. It clearly belongs together with the story of the sages as it praises God for the giving of the Torah, the fountainhead of all Jewish learning. One final note is that this text uses the word Barukh (blessed) **four times**.

I have chosen to depart from the traditional translations of the **four sons**. Hakham is usually translated as wise. I have used the word scholar for two reasons. First, this son is most concerned with scholarly issues, questions the sages of the Mishna would have asked. Second, I am contrasting him with the second son. Rasha is almost always translated as wicked or evil. I have chosen to translate the word as sinful. This child not only asks his question with contempt, but he is confining Judaism to a religion of worship. Judaism is much more than worship, and to deny the rest is sinful. The word *Tam* is the most difficult to translate. Usually it is translated as simple. Noah is also called *ish tam* in the bible. I believe that the better translation here is the word complete. Both this child, and Noah as well are really complete human beings. They live their lives fully devoted to what they believe and do what is asked of them. The seder is a time of asking questions. What question could be more complete than “What is this?” Finally the child who does not know how to ask, he is the opposite of complete. He is a total blank slate waiting to be completed.

Rabi Elazar ben Azaria said, Here I am as a seventy year old and I did not have the merit of being able to explain that the story of the exodus from Egypt should be told at night. Until Ben Zoma explained it. He said, “That you should remember the day that you left the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” The days of your life would indicate the days only. All the days of your life indicates the nights. The sages, however, say the days of your life indicate this world. All the days of your life indicate the days of the Messiah.

Blessed is the Makom, blessed is He. Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people Israel. Blessed is He.

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֶזְרִיָּה.  
הָרִי אֲנִי כְּבֹן שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה, וְלֹא  
זָכִיתִי, שֶׁתֹּאמַר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם  
בְּלֵילוֹת. עַד שֶׁדָּרָשָׁה בֶן זֹוּמָא.  
שֶׁנֶּאמַר: לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר, אֶת יוֹם  
צֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם, כָּל יְמֵי  
חַיֶּיךָ. יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַיְמָיִם. כָּל  
יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַלְיָלוֹת. וְחֻכְמָיִם  
אוֹמְרִים: יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הָעוֹלָם  
הַזֶּה. כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ לְהִבְיָא  
לַיְמוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ:

בְּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם. בְּרוּךְ הוּא. בְּרוּךְ  
שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל. בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא:

The Torah speaks of four of four contrasting children. One scholarly, one sinful, one complete and one who does not know how to ask.

כְּנֻד אַרְבַּעַת בָּנִים דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה.  
אֶחָד חָכֵם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד  
תָּם, וְאֶחָד שֶׁאֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ לְשׂאוֹל: