

## Pirkei Avot 1:3

### Translation

**Hillel used to say: The one who aggrandizes his own name, loses his own name. The one who does not increase his own knowledge, decreases it. The one who learns not, incurs death. And the one who makes use of the crown shall pass away.**

### Maimonides

He also said, when a man's name is adhered to greatness, be apprised of its cessation. He also used to say, he who does not increase in study, the Lord, may He be blessed, will put him to death. However, he who has not studied at all is worthy of being executed. *And the one who makes use of the crown will perish*; meaning to say, the one who earns a livelihood by means of the Torah and derives gain from it. This was his intention through this statement as will be made clear in this tractate. With regard to this it was said by way of an acronym: *Talmid Gavra Ahrina Chakeh Lo Puranut*. Meaning to say that a scholar is not permitted to accept service from any one except from his disciples.

### Rav Chaim of Volozhin

(Translation: Chanoch Levi in *Ruach Chaim*)

*One who seeks renown will lose his reputation.* The king instructed his servant to climb up to the loft. The servant began climbing on the first rung of the ladder. Someone asked, "Why doesn't he jump up to the fifth rung?" The king replied, "Surely you realize that it is appropriate to begin at the bottom and climb up." When the servant stopped climbing part way up the ladder, the king declared, "Now I will punish him, for although he certainly had the right to begin at the bottom, he is obligated to continue climbing until he reaches his goal." The eventual goal is to study Torah for its own sake, without

ulterior motives. This is a very lofty goal which can only be realized after many years of self-perfection. In the meantime, one should study even with the ulterior motive of desire for fame, but should realize that it is but one rung on the ladder of perfection. If one does not start at the bottom, no progress will ever be made. It is imperative, however, to continue climbing, to continue perfecting oneself. One who seeks renown for his Torah study will lose his reputation, will forget even what he has already learned. But this will occur only if he does not increase Torah study, only if he does not continue climbing the ladder of perfection. If he does continue to improve, the imperfect Torah study is viewed as a step, a tool to aid him in perfection. As the Talmud says, "A person should involve himself in Torah study with ulterior motives, for through his self-serving worship he will come to worship with proper motives" (*Pesachim* 50b).

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר: נִגִיד שְׂמָא  
אֶבֶד שְׂמָה, וּדְלָא מוֹסִיף יֶסֶף,  
וּדְלָא יַלְיף קְטָלָא חַיִּב,  
וּדְאֲשֵׁתַיְמֵשׁ בְּתַגָּא חֵלְף:

Lest one conclude that if improper Torah study is so fraught with peril then it is better not to study at all, the *mishnah* cautions that he who does not learn deserves death. Torah must be studied, even with improper motives, as long as one strives to eventually study it for its own sake. Alternatively, "one who does not add" refers to one who does not study more and more. If he does not continue to study, he will forget his previous learning. This *mishnah* can also be referring to a verse in *Mishlei*: "A path of life above for the intelligent one, so that he will turn away from the grave below" (*Mishlei* 15:24). Some people do not aspire to spiritual greatness and are content to remain at whatever level they have attained. Man is dynamic, he never stays the same. The only way to prevent a fall to the grave is by continuously climbing up the ladder of life. One who does not add will lose, because there is no such thing as remaining static: either you go up or down.