

**Translation**

Rabbi Akiva said: Jesting and levity habituate a person to immorality. The transmitted tradition is a fence to the Torah, tithes are a fence to riches, vows are a fence to separateness, a fence to wisdom is silence.

**Maimonides**

When a man makes vows and fulfills them, he will achieve the trait of absention from that of which he wishes

to abstain. That trait will become firm with him, and *separateness* will be simple for him; meaning to say, the vigilance of defilements, as they said in Hagigah to the Pharisees: The

clothes of an *Am Ha'aretz* are imbued with treading - contact defilement.

**Rav Chaim of Volozhin**

(As Read by Chanoch Levi in "*Ruach Chaim*")

*Jokes and levity*, etc. Although Rav Yishmael encourages us to greet people with joy (Avos 3:16), we must take care not to allow our joy to escalate into jokes and levity. *The tradition is a fence for the Torah*. A man invested huge sums of money in a beautiful garden. After the flowers and trees were planted, he invested a large sum of money in an elaborate security system. Although the fence did not contribute to

the beauty of the place, it was needed to preserve that which he had created. Moreover, he did not mind paying the considerable cost. The Sages spent many hours calculating the tradition: how many letters are in the *Torah*, how many times does a particular word appear in *Tanach*, etc. Then they created mnemonic devices to remember all of this information. Although these facts are not particularly

important, they serve as a fence, a device to assure that nothing is lost or added to the *Torah*. They are, therefore, worth the time invested. In this same regard, the

various tithes consume a fifth of the farmer's produce, but they serve to protect the remainder of the harvest. The practice of taking vows is strongly discouraged (Nedarim 22a), but someone who is striving to reach the level of *perishus*, abstinence from the pleasures of this world, is permitted to utilize vows as a tool to aid him in this quest. There are times when wisdom may be lost by remaining silent, but gained through the use of speech. Nevertheless, more wisdom will be preserved through silence than as a result of speech.

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר: שְׂחוֹק וְקִלּוֹת רֵאשׁ, מְרַגְּלִין לְעֶרְוָה. מְסוּרֶת, סִיג לְתוֹרָה. מְעֻשְׂרוֹת, סִיג לְעֵשֶׂר. נְדָרִים, סִיג לְפְרִישוֹת. סִיג לְחֻכְמָה, שְׂתִיקָה: