

THE MAHARAL



Basic facts about the Maharal

- ✧ Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1515 to 1609) is known as the Maharal of Prague. **Maharal** is a Hebrew acronym for **M**oreinu **H**a-**R**av **L**owe, "Our Teacher, Rabbi Loew."
- ✧ He is known for his work on Jewish mysticism and philosophy and is considered one of the most important Rabbis of all time.
- ✧ His primary work is Gur Aryeh, a commentary on Rashi's commentary.
- ✧ The Maharal's synagogue, the **Altneuschul** (the Old New Shul), is the oldest active synagogue in Europe.
- ✧ He is closely associated with the creation of the **Golem of Prague**, a legend of a clay creature created by man.

Maharal's approach to Aggadah (Be'er HaGolah: Be'er 6)

All of the wisdom of Aggadah is the wisdom of the Torah. If you want to know who created everything, delve into Aggadah. They open the gates in heaven and open everything that is closed.

אבל כל דברי אגדה חכמת התורה היא, שעל זה אמרו (ספרי דברים יא, כב) אם רצונך להכיר את יוצר הכל, עסוק באגדה, עד כאן. כי הם בודאי פותחין שער השמים, ופותחים כל אוצר סתום וחתום

How King David is first introduced in Tanach (Shmuel Aleph 16:18)

One of the attendants spoke up, "I have observed a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite **who is known how to sing; he is a fine warrior** and a man of war, sensible in speech, and handsome in appearance, and God is with him."

ויען אֶחָד מֵהַנְּעָרִים וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה רָאִיתִי בֶן לְיִשִׁי בֵּית הַלְּחָמִי יָדַע נָגֵן וְגִבּוֹר חַיִל וְאִישׁ מִלְחָמָה וְנָבוֹן דָּבָר וְאִישׁ תֹּאֵר וְה' עִמּוֹ.

The Talmud's interpretation of the description of Dovid HaMelech (Sanhedrin 90b)

"Who knows how to sing" means he knows how to **ask** questions. "A fine warrior" means he knows how to **answer**.

יודע נגן שיודע לישאל, גבור שיודע להשיב

Maharal's explanation for how singing corresponds to asking questions and being a warrior corresponds to answering questions. (Netzach Yisrael 32)

What does singing have to do with asking questions? They share similar qualities. When someone asks a question, the listener rejoices and it opens their heart as if they were listening to music.

The happiness that emerges from hearing words of Torah, is more similar to hearing a question, than listening to an answer. And that is why if you know how to ask questions, you know how to sing and if you know how to answer you are a fine warrior—as it is found in the Gemara. The function of a great question is better than the function of a great answer.

ומה שאמר (סנהדרין צג.) "יודע נגן" (ש"א טז, יח) יודש לשאול. פירוש, מי ש"יודע נגן" והשואל מדה אחת להם. לפי שהתורה משמח לב האדם, וכאשר ישאל אדם הוא משמח לב השומע, ופותח את לבו עד ששמח, כמו שעושה מי שיודע נגן.

The Maharal models the strength of questions in his commentary on the very first mishnah in Pirkei Avot. Read the following mishna closely and carefully. How many questions can you come up with on this Mishnah? (Answers at the bottom of the page.)

Mishnah: Pirkei Avot 1:1

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah.

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמִסָּרָה לְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים מְסֻרוֹהָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה. הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדֵינָם, וְהֵעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה, וַעֲשׂוּ סְגִי לַתּוֹרָה:

1. Why does this mishnah about the transmission of the Torah appear here - at the very beginning of Pirkei Avot?
2. Why doesn't it say that Moshe received the Torah from *Hashem*?
3. Why doesn't the mishnah say "Yehoshua received it from Moshe"?
4. Why does the mishnah use different languages of transmission?
5. Why doesn't it differentiate between elders?
6. Why are elders and prophets differentiated?
7. Why do we only have ethical teachings from the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah?