

Technically, Mishnah Avot has five chapters. But if you look at a separate volume of Pirkei Avot, or in a *siddur* (prayer book) that includes Pirkei Avot, or sometimes even in a volume of mishnah itself, you'll find six chapters. So what's the deal?

In fact, the sixth chapter is not part of the Mishnah, officially. It is a *baraita* (excluded teaching), a record of a conversation by the rabbis that, for whatever reason, was not included in the Mishnah when it was codified. Same rabbis, same topics, same style; these just didn't "make the cut."

Why are they included in Pirkei Avot? Since it's a tradition to study a chapter of Avot each Shabbat between Pesach and Shavuot, and there are six *Shabbatot* (plural of Shabbat), this baraita was added to "fill out the roster." Because each statement in chapter six comments on the importance of studying Torah (as opposed to praising character traits as in previous chapters) it is called *kinyan torah* (the acquisition of Torah). Verse three offers some food for thought:

Pirkei Avot 6:3

הַלּוֹמֵד מֵחֵבֶרֶת פֶּרֶק אֶחָד אוֹ הֶלְכָּה אֶחָת אוֹ פְּסוּק אֶחָד אוֹ דְּבַר אֶחָד אוֹ אֶפְלוּ אוֹת אֶחָת, צָרִיף לְנֶהוּג בּוֹ כְּבוֹד, שֶׁפֶן מְצִינּוֹ בְּדוֹד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁלֹּא לִמַּד מֵאַחִיתָפֶל אֶלָּא שְׁנֵי דְּבָרִים בְּלָבָד, קָרָאוּ רַבּוֹ אֵלּוּפּוֹ וּמִיָּדְעוֹ ...

"He who learns from his friend one chapter or one law or one verse or one word or even one letter [of Torah] is obliged to treat him with respect. For so we find King David, who learned only two things from Achitophel and yet called him his master, his guide, and his intimate friend. ..."

What two things did King David learn from Achitophel? Rabbi Simcha ben Sh'muel (1040-1105 CE; disciple of Rashi and compiler/commentator of Machzor Vitry) says: the importance of studying Torah with a group and the importance of worshiping as part of a congregation. While the letter of Jewish law can be observed alone, the spirit of Jewish life requires community. How does communal engagement elevate your Jewish life?

*Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom*