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Cultivating Character

LIFE WISDOM FROM THE
ETHICS OF OUR FATHERS

CHAPTER 4

REVERSE EDUCATION

THE TORAH'S COUNTERINTUITIVE PERSPECTIVES ON
WISDOM, POWER, WEALTH, AND HONOR



MISHNAH 1

בן זומא אומר:
איזהו חכם? הלומד מכל אדם. שנאמר (תהלים קיט), מכל מלמדי השכלתי
כי עדותיך שיחה לי.
איזהו גבור? הכובש את יצרו. שנאמר (משלי טז), טוב ארך אפים מגבור ומשל
ברוחו מלכד עיר.
איזהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו. שנאמר (תהלים קכח), יגיע כפיה כי תאכל אשריה
וטוב לך. "אשריה", בעולם הזה. "וטוב לך", לעולם הבא.
איזהו מכבד? המכבד את הבריות. שנאמר (שמואל א ב), כי מכבדי אכבד ובזי
יקלו.

Ben Zoma would say:

Who is wise? One who learns from every person. As is stated (Psalms 119:99), "From all my teachers I have grown wise, for Your testimonials are my meditation."

Who is strong? The person who conquers their own inclinations. As is stated (Proverbs 16:32), "Better one who is slow to anger than one with might, one who rules their spirit than the conqueror of a city."

Who is rich? The person who is satisfied with their lot. As is stated (Psalms 128:2), "If you eat of toil of your hands, fortunate are you, and good is to you." "Fortunate are you" in this world, and "good is to you" in the World to Come.

Who is honored? The person who honors their fellow creatures. As is stated (I Samuel 2:30), "For to those who honor Me, I accord honor; those who scorn Me will be demeaned."