

a **CALL** *to*
ACTION

PIRKEI AVOS

**PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION
FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE REBBE
5748-5752**

**A PROJECT OF
HaMaaseh Hu HaIkar**

a CALL to ACTION

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Foreword

We are pleased to bring you this newly published edition of ***a Call to Action*** to coincide with our study of Pirkei Avos. Translated from its Hebrew counterpart, *HaMaaseh Hu Halkar*, this presentation is a collection of practical instruction from the Rebbe's *sichos* pertaining to the study of Pirkei Avos.

HaMaaseh Hu Halkar is a compilation of *hora'os* culled from the Rebbe's talks in the years 5748 to 5752 (1988-1992), from both edited and unedited sources (*muga* and *bilti muga*). Great effort has been extended to remain faithful to the Rebbe's calculated and instructive nuance. This English translation was rendered by **Rabbi Yaakov Paley**.

At this time, when Moshiach's arrival is imminent, the Rebbe, *Melech HaMoshiach*, has emphasized the primacy of action. We are now beginning to experience the era when we will fully appreciate 'the superiority of deed' above scholarship. May it happen now, completely and speedily!

Editorial Office of
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Pirkei Avos

Ethics of Our Fathers

INTRODUCTION

***The Talmud:**¹ One who wishes to be a Chossid (“one who goes beyond the letter of the law, and who strives to conduct himself in the best possible way out of love for Hashem”), should fulfill the words of [Pirkei] Avos!*

Commentaries explain (and the Rebbe constantly emphasizes) that the entire collection of teachings found in Pirkei Avos represent “milsah d’chassidusah” – matters of pious conduct.

***The Alter Rebbe**² writes in his Siddur, “It is customary to say Pirkei Avos, one chapter on each Shabbos between Pesach and Shavuos, at Mincha ... And some have the custom to do so through all Shabbosim of the summer”.*

***Midrash Shmuel**³: One of the reasons for this practice is because the Torah is given on Shavuos, and one who studies Torah must first know the approach to its study and how he should conduct himself subsequent to its study. It was therefore established to study Pirkei Avos in order that the heart of every Jew will be prepared to accept the Torah wholeheartedly, and to conduct himself with the Torah in a lawful and proper manner.⁴*

Additionally⁵, since nature gains strength so-to-speak during the summer season, all people engage in matters that concern bodily health and fitness in the

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1. Bava Kama 3a.
 2. Standard Siddur Tehillas Hashem p.211.
 3. Intro to Midrash Shmuel, section entitled Amar Hamechaber – V’od Matzatzi Kasuv.
 4. Parshas Bamidbar 5749 – Hisvaduyos p.215.
 5. Midrash Shmuel ibid, section entitled v’Efshar, with comments by the Rebbe (see next note).

summertime. Now, that may be appropriate for those who conduct themselves according to nature alone; the Jewish nation however, conducts itself according to the Torah. We therefore spend this time involved in the health and fitness of the soul (via studying Pirkei Avos and implementing its directives). This has the natural effect of ensuring a healthy body too (in the manner of preventative medicine⁶).

***The Rebbe** adds:⁷ Since we are concerned with bodily health during the summer, we must make certain that it does not lead to “Yishurun grew fat and kicked [i.e., the Jewish people grew prosperous and rebelled]”. We therefore study Pirkei Avos, which deals with character refinement and arouses the Jewish people to pursue goodly qualities and to step beyond the call of duty.*

Moreover, the effect of saying Pirkei Avos throughout the summer months is also continued into the all the Shabbosim (and thereby into all of the weekdays) of the winter season too!⁸

STUDY, DON'T SAY

- Since the teachings of Pirkei Avos are part of the Oral Torah they must be completely understood by the person who studies them. Therefore, it is not sufficient to merely *recite* Pirkei Avos – albeit correctly, taking care to fully pronounce each word⁹ – but we should rather study the teachings *in depth* as is the law governing the study of the Oral Torah.¹⁰

6. 2nd Day of Shavuos 5750 – Hisvaduyos p.281.

7. Ibid, footnote 37.

8. Parshas Shemini 5750 – Hivaduyos p.96.

9. “It is currently the Shabbos ... when we launch the saying of Pirkei Avos for the entire year. It is therefore proper to use this occasion to promote, that in addition to *reciting* the Pirkei Avos appropriately (being scrupulous to fully pronounce every word) we should also put effort into the *thought* and *intention* i.e., the comprehension, of the subject matter.” (Parshas Shemini 5750 – Hivaduyos p.96)

10. Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso, 1st Farbrengen.

“Nonetheless, the custom as it has been practiced for generations has been to merely *recite* Pirkei Avos without any comprehension! The reason for this conduct

AT LEAST ONE MISHNAH IN DEPTH

- It is not demanded of each one of us that we study *all* the teachings of the *entire* chapter in depth, each and every Shabbos... Such a requirement would be rather difficult to implement! However, we should at least study *one* teaching from each chapter in depth, as befits the study of the Oral Torah. (And the students of the Tomchei Temimim Yeshivah *certainly* ought to do so...¹¹)¹²

ALTER REBBE'S NUSACH

- We should read Pirkei Avos from the version edited by the Alter Rebbe (and printed in standard Siddur Tehillas Hashem, p.211-234).¹³

MISHNAH WITH MEFARSHIM

- While reading, we should have a copy of Mishnah at hand, which includes the explanations of the classic commentaries on the Mishnah – at least the two foremost commentators: Ikar

is (no doubt) due to our being heavily involved with other matters; perhaps we have gone someplace to review words of Chassidus there, as is customary, even to the extent of deriving novel Torah thoughts from the Torah's inner and revealed dimensions..." (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Korach 5751)

"We could suggest a reason for this conduct (which is commonplace despite the requirement that the Oral Torah be studied with comprehension), namely, that it directly follows a prayer service (Mincha). And the concept of prayer does not involve study – on the contrary, the more uncomplicated and straightforwardly sincere the better... This then rubs off on the reading of Pirkei Avos, with the result that it too is not much of a study – as we plainly witness in the conduct of the majority of people..." (Parshas Korach, footnote 123, 5750 – Hivaduyos p.406)

11. "For this is their entire theme – to study Torah with its commentary and to comprehend it." (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso, 1st Farbrengen)
12. "Since "I only request according to their strength"... (ibid)
"Preferably, they should study one Mishnah (or several Mishna'os) in depth and with comprehension." (Parshas Bamidbar, 2nd Day of Shavuos 5751 – Hivaduyos p.275)

Tosefos Yom Tov and the Bartenura. We should use these texts to study at least one teaching with the classic commentaries.¹³

SPREAD THIS CUSTOM

- Those of us who visit other congregations each Shabbos to impart Torah teachings should promote the customary reading of Pirkei Avos by those congregations, along with the directive to study at least one teaching in depth.¹⁴

THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

- If we failed to read Pirkei Avos following Mincha, we could still do so until Havdalah¹⁵. In fact, we should continue this study throughout the week that follows, like the common tradition of taking along a book of Mishnah when embarking on a journey, and studying Mishna'os while traveling (so as to “study the Torah’s laws each day”) [Pikei Avos is itself a book of Mishnah -Ed].¹⁶

MAKE IT YOUR CUSTOM

- Those who have not followed the custom to study Pirkei Avos each Shabbos during the **summer months** – or at least have not been overly particular about implementing it – in the past¹⁷, should now accept this custom upon themselves for this current year¹⁸. And do not suffice with merely reading the

13. “The teachings of Pirkei Avos constitute Oral Torah; its commentaries are then the ‘Oral Torah within the Oral Torah!’” (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso, 1st Farbrengen)

14. Roshei Devarim to Parshas Korach 5751.

15. Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso (2nd Farbrengen), Sivan 12 5751.

16. Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso, 1st Farbrengen.

17. “There is a widely publicized custom to study and publicly review Chassidic teachings after the Mincha prayer on Shabbos afternoons. However, this is obviously an *addition* to our observance of the Alter Rebbe’s directive, written in the Siddur he compiled, regarding the reading of Pirkei Avos during these Shabbosim.” (Parshas Shemini 5751, footnote 133 – Hisvaduyos p.132.

18. “This is the lesson and practical directive: We should continue studying Pirkei Avos throughout the Shabbosim of the summer months. And although we cannot hold a complaint against anyone who fails to comply with this directive, claiming

teachings, but rather study at least one teaching from each chapter in depth...¹⁹

COMPENSATE BY BOOSTING

- There is a way for those of us who have not followed²⁰ or were not scrupulous about observing this custom until now²¹ to made amends (a “*tikun*”²²): Influence at least one other Jew who was unaware of this custom to begin studying Pirkei Avos!²²

that the Alter Rebbe himself made a distinction between the study of Pirkei Avos prior to the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot and after it [merely writing that “*some* have the custom to continue its study”...] – nevertheless, we *should* add in this regard and *not* rely on this ‘waiver’. We should continue reciting and studying Pirkei Avos each Shabbos during the summer!” (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Naso, 1st Farbrengen)

“The Alter Rebbe writes in his Siddur that “some have the custom to [continue the weekly Pirkei Avos] throughout each Shabbos in the summer months”. Now, that is also the *Chabad* custom.” (Parshas Shemini 5750 – Hisvaduyos p.96)

“This was the custom of all the Rebbes of Chabad! Indeed, we find numerous Chassidus discourses that were recited during the summer months, which are based on the teachings of our Sages from the chapter of Pirkei Avos recited that Shabbos.” (Roshei Devarim, Parshas Naso, Sivan 12 5751(1st Farbrengen))

19. “In depth, as is demanded from the study of the Oral Torah” (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Bamidbar 5751)
20. “There are some people to whom, for various strange reasons, this custom means nothing. The situation is worsened by the fact that the time for studying Pirkei Avos directly follows the Mincha service, which is the established time for studying Chassidus, delivering public reviews of discourses, and the like. Nevertheless, seeing that the Alter Rebbe wrote in his Siddur that “We have the custom to read Pirkei Avos...” and he furthermore concludes with “And some have the custom to do so during every Shabbos in the summer months”, we clearly *should* be scrupulous in observing this custom...! Therefore, those who have not followed... [See main text above for continuation].” (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Shemini 5751)
21. “From now on they should be *doubly* scrupulous. That is to say, in addition to their being careful to personally observe this custom in the future, they should also influence... [See main text above for continuation].” (ibid)
22. “Based on the words of the Alter Rebbe in the Siddur, which he compiled in order to be *universally utilized* i.e., even by those who in fact pray from other versions of the prayer text; they too should follow the directive of “some have the custom to do so during every Shabbos in the summer months”!” (Parshas Naso 5750 – Hisvaduyos p.297)

FOR ALL JEWS

- We should publicize this practice to those who pray from a different *nusach* (version of Siddur) than ours and therefore until now only studied Pirkei Avos during the period between Pesach and Shavuos. They too should increase their study from now on, to include every Shabbos throughout the summer months.

CONTINUE TEACHING MA'AMORIM

- Even during a Shabbos when we ‘actually and openly²³’ [i.e., officially] study Pirkei Avos, we should nevertheless continue the weekly practice of publicly reviewing Chassidic discourses. (In fact, particularly during the weeks of the counting of the Omer ... which is a preparation for receiving the Torah on Shavuos, we should strongly emphasize *all* areas of Torah and *especially* its inner teachings...)

WHEN THERE ARE TWO CHAPTERS

- During those weeks (prior to Rosh Hashanah) when we recite *two* chapters of Pirkei Avos each week, we recite the Mishnah “Kol Yisrael – All Israel have a portion...” as an introduction to both chapters.²⁴

23. “Additionally, all of these matters apply to every Shabbos of the year. For although the reading and study of Pirkei Avos is only done during the summer Shabbosim – and the essential custom is restricted to the Shabbosim “between Pesach and Shavuos” – it is nevertheless understood that all the themes discussed in Pirkei Avos continue throughout the *entire* year. This is so, despite the fact that our year-long service does not include an open recital of Pirkei Avos, but rather the review of Chassidic texts and the like.

The reverse is also true: Even during a Shabbos when we ‘actually and openly’ study Pirkei Avos... [See main text above for continuation.]” (Roshei Devarim to Parshas Tazri’ah-Metzorah, Iyar 6 5751)

24. Parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech 5750, footnote 34 – Hisvaduyos p.293.

The editors of *HaMaaseh Hu HaIkar* seek dedicated individuals who would like to sponsor future editions of a **CALL to ACTION**. Please contact Levi at 347-268-3299. Thank you.



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