

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek I

24 Tammuz, 5782 – July 23, 2022

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
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Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos Chapter I

Likkutei Sichos Volume 28, Page 653¹

Chapter I, Mishnah 1

פרק א', משנה א': משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. הם אמרו שלושה דברים, "הו מתונים בדין, והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, ועשו סיג לתורה."

Chapter 1, Mishnah 1: Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and gave it to Yehoshua. Yehoshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said these three things, "Be cautious in judgment. Establish many pupils. And make a fence around the Torah."

The Simple Explanation

The first chapter of Pirkei Avos begins by telling us the order of the transmission of the Torah; the Torah was received by Moshe, who transmitted it to Yehoshua, and so on. This description of the Torah's transmission continues until it reaches the "men of the Great Assembly - Anshei Knesses Hagedolah." Why did Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi² choose to delineate the order of the Torah's transmission here³? Commentaries explain⁴ that Pirkei Avos does not contain laws or rituals. Instead, it teaches us ethics and good character traits. The fact is that the nations of the world have also composed works of ethics. The book of Avos begins by telling us that *our* ethics come directly from Sinai, from the Torah, which Hashem taught Moshe.

Whenever the Mishnah says that "they said," or "he said," it does not mean that the particular lesson (or lessons) is *everything* the particular rabbi taught; rather, it is a teaching which the Sage would often repeat. The men of the Great Assembly would frequently admonish judges, teachers, and all of us to "(1) be cautious in judgment, (2) establish many pupils, and (3) make a fence around the Torah."

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

As we have discussed many times, the teachings of Avos help one become Chossid⁵. Being a

1. The entire contents of this explanation are contained within footnote 48, there.

2. He was the one who edited the Mishnah; he decided what to include, and where to place it.

3. For a more complete list of the chain of transmission, see the Rambam's introduction to his Mishnah Torah.

4. See the commentary of the Bartenura at the beginning of Pirkei Avos.

5. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

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Chossid means attaining an extra degree of piety and involves going beyond the Torah's requirements. Due to one's zealousness in fulfilling what Hashem demands of us, a pious individual is not satisfied with the minimum requirements of the law. The righteous individual will strive to go above and beyond the minimum requirements of Torah law. Not only that, but he will also place "fences" around the Torah's laws. He will take upon himself additional restrictions to ensure he does not stumble.

Had any of the Sages listed earlier in the Mishnah said something which could add to our piety, the Mishnah would have said so. It seems strange that until the time of the Knesses Hagedolah, not one Sage said anything that could help one attain additional piety. We're discussing a period of approximately one millennium, and we are talking about people who were among the greatest Tzaddikim and Chassidim in history. Nevertheless, we find no such teaching until the time of the Great Assembly.

The Explanation

This can be understood based on a teaching of the Alter Rebbe⁶. He writes that in the earlier generations, the Torah's commandments were enough for one to maintain a high spiritual level because of their holiness and great spiritual stature. They did not need additional fences or stringencies. Unlike the earlier generations, now we need the lessons of Pirkei Avos.

It was not until the later generations, when the darkness and concealment of G-d's presence became greater and our hearts became weaker, that we needed something extra. We lacked the same ability to deal with spiritual darkness, so the need arose for Pirkei Avos; there was a need for stronger ammunition to help us in the battle against the concealment of Hashem's presence within the world. After the time of the biblical prophets, when the world became spiritually weaker, we needed to struggle to serve Hashem with love. There was a need for extra stringencies, over and above those commanded by the Torah.

It is true that even in the time of Moshe Rabbeinu, there were wicked people; not everyone was a Tzaddik. However, as is also explained by the Alter Rebbe⁷, it was not the same as it is at present. Everything, for the most part, was much more extreme. In the earlier days, one who was righteous was a great Tzaddik. One who was not a good person was entirely wicked; he intentionally allowed himself to be led astray. The righteous had total control over themselves. Immediately upon contemplating Hashem's greatness, they would be gripped by a feeling of total awe of G-d. In other words, the righteous who were complete Tzaddikim did not need the teachings of Avos. On the other hand, wicked people would not be

6. See Likkutei Torah Parshas Matos, 85, a.

7. See Torah Ohr Parshas Mikeitz, 41, a.

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helped by the piety taught in Pirkei Avos.

Currently, for the most part, there are no people with the level of righteousness that existed in the earlier generations. However, by and large, there are also not those who are completely wicked, as in the previous generations. We all need reinforcement to enable us truly serve G-d. Our all-knowing G-d supplied us with the proper tool at the appropriate time, which can be used to reach the true love of Hashem.

May we all use the tools we have been given and be Chassidim in the truest sense of the word. In this merit, we will undoubtedly greet Moshiach now!

(Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Matos-Masei, 5746)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

**Dr. Mindel Rivka (Muriel) bas Reb Menachem Mendel Shlomo ע"ה
Stitt**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיחיו

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו

Morris

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו

Morris

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther' שתחי Sharabani

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) שי' Bentov

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

*** * ***

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מרת מינדל רבקה בת ר' מנחם מענדל שלמה ע"ה

סתית

נפטרה ש"ק פרשת לך לך, יו"ד מר-חשון תשפ"ב

ת. ג. צ. ב. ה.

נדבת בני משפחתה שיחיו

*** * ***

לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם"

חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו

מאריס

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו

מאריס

*** * ***

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