

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek VI

19 Tammuz, 5780 – July 11, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos
Chapter VI**

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Chapter VI

פרק ו', משנה ה': אל תבקש גדולה לעצמך, ואל תחמוד כבוד. יותר מלמודך עשה, ואל תתאוה לשולחנם של מלכים, ששולחנך גדול משולחנם וכתרך גדול מכתרם; ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעלתך.

Chapter 6, Mishnah 5: Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not desire honor. More than you study, do. Do not want the table of kings, for your table is more significant than theirs, and your crown is higher than theirs. Your Employer is faithful to pay you for the rewards of your work.

The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah¹ is part of the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos, which is referred to as “Kinyan Torah – Acquiring the Torah.” As is the case with the entire chapter, this is a teaching which focuses on the importance of Torah study.

“Do not seek greatness for yourself,” do not run after positions of leadership. “Do not desire honor,” one who wishes honor for his Torah knowledge appears to be studying for ulterior motives. “More than you study, do.” Your Mitzvah observance must outweigh your Torah study. This is in keeping with the teaching that² “one whose deeds are greater than his wisdom can be compared to a tree with many roots and few branches. All of the storms in the world cannot budge it from its place.” Our teaching continues, “Do not desire the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs.” “Your table” refers to the reward which you will receive for the Torah study³.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We need to understand why one who is involved with studying the Torah would desire a king's table! The question is even more difficult considering the order in which the Mishnah lists these teachings. First, the Mishnah tells us to seek neither greatness nor to desire honor. Only then are we taught not to want to sit at a royal table. One who is not interested or honor would not care about a king's table!

1. Unlike the first five chapters of Avos, whose teachings are all part of the Mishnah, this chapter consists of teachings from the Beraysos. Beraysos are teachings from the Sages of the Mishnah, which were not included in the body of the Mishnah. Hence their name; the word Beraysos is related to the Aramaic word meaning outside; they are teachings which are outside of the scope of the Mishnah.

2. Pirkei Avos, Chapter 3, Mishnah 17.

3. The above is the explanation of the Bartenura.

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However, the Mishnah expresses this in a manner that makes it seem as if a royal table in and of itself is not all that bad. The Mishnah teaches us that the reason not to desire it is because “your table is greater than theirs.” It would seem as if otherwise, there might be a reason to desire a king’s table.

The Explanation

The Sages teach us that Pirkei Avos teaches one how to be a Chossid. The meaning of the word “Chossid” in this context is one who goes beyond what the letter of the law requires⁴. Hence, the same is true of the teachings contained in Avos regarding the acquisition of Torah. We are discussing one whose toil in Torah study is way beyond what might be expected. Granted, he does enjoy learning Torah. However, his exertion is far greater than it would be were his studies purely for the pleasure which he derives.

This is following the words of the Mishnah, “More than you study, do.” We explained that the deed, which is expressed here, refers to Mitzvah performance; that “one’s deeds must be greater than his wisdom.” That is true. However, it is also possible to explain it differently. The deed referred to here can be Torah study itself. The Mishnah is saying that one should force oneself to study, do, beyond that to which he may naturally be accustomed.

The Torah makes a specific promise to one who studies in this manner. The Torah states⁵, “If you follow My statutes.” This means⁶ “that you toil in the study of Torah.” The result of this will be that you shall receive the most significant rewards⁷; “I will give your rains in their time, the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit ...” In other words, he is assured of obtaining all of his physical needs. This means that he controls rules over the world. This is why the Sages say that the answer to the question, “Who are our kings?” is the rabbis⁸.

That is the reason why the Mishnah teaches us not to desire the table of kings. The fact is that one who *toils* in Torah exerts himself *beyond* his ability, is rewarded with sitting at the royal table. Nevertheless, one should not desire this. The Mishnah is not teaching us not to be involved with the

4. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

5. Parshas Bechukosai, Vayikroh 26:3.

6. See Rashi’s commentary *ibid*.

7. *Ibid.*, Verses 4-12.

8. See the Talmud Gittin 62, a.

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physical, material world. To the contrary, one must use this physical world to elevate it to holiness. However, one must not desire, take pleasure from the physical for its own sake⁹.

However, this begs the question, why should one *not* want the king's table? Elevating the world to G-dliness is an essential part of our mission in this world. The explanation is, as the Mishnah continues, that "your table is greater than theirs and your crown is greater than theirs." The connection with Hashem, which can be achieved through the Torah study, is far greater than anything which one can attain through elevating the physical¹⁰. However, we must be involved with both. In this manner, we will bring about the fulfillment of Hashem's desire to have a dwelling place in this world. We are thereby bringing the complete and true redemption now.

Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, 5722)

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

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9. See Tanya, the beginning of Chapter 7.

10. See Tanya Chapter 5.

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