

בס"ד

# PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

## Perek III

11 Menachem Av, 5780 – August 1, 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 III**

Likkutei Sichos, Volume 4, Pages 1207 - 1210

**Chapter III**

**פרק ג', משנה א':** עקביא בן מהללאל אומר, הסתכל בשלושה דברים ואין אתה בא לידי עבירה. דע מאין באת, ולאן אתה הולך, ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון.

מאין באת? מטפה סרוחה. ולאן אתה הולך? למקום עפר רמה ותולעה. ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון? לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא.

**Chapter 3, Mishnah 1:** Akavia, the son of Mahalalel, would say, "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of sin. Know from where you came, where you are going and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting. From where you came; from a putrid drop. Where you are going; to a place of dust, maggots, and worms. Before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting; before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

**The Simple Explanation**

This Mishnah teaches us methods for avoiding sin. It goes beyond that. By following the teachings of this Mishnah, one can even go beyond distancing oneself from sin. It is possible even to avoid "the hands of sin;" to remain distant from anything which can lead to sin.

By reflecting that one comes from a putrid drop, he will not succumb to arrogance. Dwelling on this removes the tendency to be vain; there is no cause to feel superior. Vanity is a common cause of sin. If one considers himself the "center of the universe," there is nothing to prevent him from doing whatever he wants.

Reflection upon the end of one's physical body, "a place of dust, maggots, and worms," helps to eliminate the traits of chasing physical desires and running after money. After all, what point is there to accumulating wealth?

Likewise, contemplating that one must ultimately give a "judgement and accounting" for all of his actions will help to keep his actions in check<sup>2</sup>.

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1. It is obvious that the soul of a Jew, which is from where he really comes, is an actual part of Hashem (see Tanya Chapter 2, as we shall see further). Similarly, a Jewish soul ascends to the highest levels to bask in G-d's presence. However, for the purpose of distancing oneself from sin it is beneficial to reflect upon the beginning and the end (albeit a temporary end – there will be a resurrection of the dead) of the body.

2. This explanation of the Mishnah is based on the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.

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### Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Mishnah teaches us to contemplate the fact that we will ultimately need to give a "judgement and accounting" of our actions in this lifetime. This expression requires explanation. When an individual is facing trial, he must first offer an accounting of the activities for which he is being tried. Once his accounting is complete, the judge issues a verdict. The "accounting" comes before the "judgement." We need to understand why the Mishnah says, "judgement and accounting." First accounting and then judgement would appear to be the correct order.

### The Answer

We can understand this based on the Baal Shem Tov's explanation<sup>3</sup> of a different Mishnah in this chapter of Pirkei Avos<sup>4</sup>. The Mishnah says that "... the collectors make their rounds every day and exact payment from man, (both) with his knowledge and without his knowledge ..." Hashem causes a person to be punished for his actions (payment is exacted from him) based on a verdict which he renders (*with his knowledge*). He issues the decision for his sin. How does this come about?

One who is standing in judgment before the Heavenly Court is told of a person who committed an infraction similar to that which he had performed. He is not told that, in actuality, he is judging himself (the judgment is being done *without his knowledge*). The individual is then given the punishment, which *he* decided upon. This explains the order of the phrase "judgement and accounting." First comes the individual's own "judgement" of his infraction. Only then is there the "accounting," demonstrating that he did commit the very same sin.

The order of the two parts of the expression is now clear. However, the reason for the necessity of concluding as to the person's judgment in this seemingly round-about manner is still challenging to understand. One would think that the angels who decide in the Heavenly Court are capable of reaching a verdict on their own, without any help!

The explanation is that each Jewish soul is "an actual part of Hashem above<sup>5</sup>." G-d is a perfect unity; He is one essential being. The Baal Shem Tov taught that<sup>6</sup> "when one grasps part of the essence, he is grasping the entire essence." This means that within each Jew, there is found the essence of G-d Almighty Himself! Therefore, a created being has neither the right nor the ability to judge a Jew. This includes even the ministering angels! Since it is not possible to judge a Jew, he must issue the judgment

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3. This explanation is brought in Likkutei Maharan, Chapter 113.

4. Pirkei Avos Chapter 3, Mishnah 16.

5. The quotation is from Iyov 31:2. Tanya, at the beginning of Chapter 2 adds the word "actual."

6. This is quoted in the Chassidic discourse of 5666, Page 522.

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upon himself.

This teaches us several lessons. We see from this the greatness of every Jew. No matter what he looks like, he contains the essence of Hashem. Additionally, it teaches us how important it is to never judge any Jew in a less than favorable light. We may be casting aspersions upon ourselves (G-d forbid). Through this love of every fellow Jew, we will undoubtedly merit Moshiach now!

*(Adapted from a talk given on Yud Shevat, 5720)*

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

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