

בס"ד

# PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

## Perek I & II

9 Elul, 5780 – August 29, 2020

Compiled from the works of  
**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**  
**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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

**Likkutei Sichos Volume 27, Pages 164 - 166**

**Chapter I**

**פרק א', משנה ו':** יהושע בן פרחיה ונתאי הארבלי קיבלו מהם. יהושע בן פרחיה אומר: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר, והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

**Chapter 1, Mishnah 6:** Yehoshua ben Perachia and Nitai Ho'arbeili received from them. Yehoshua ben Perachia would say, "Assume a master for yourself, acquire a friend for yourself, and judge every man favorably."

**The Simple Explanation**

Our Mishnah quotes three teachings from Yehoshua ben Perachia. We will focus on the third teaching, to "judge every man favorably." There are commentaries that explain this in the following manner<sup>1</sup>. Suppose that one performed an action that can be explained in two possible manners. It is possible to assume that he did something which was improper. However, one can also interpret his actions as having been proper. The Mishnah is teaching us, that in this instance, a "Chossid," one who goes beyond the letter of the law, must assume that his fellow's act was a good one.

This teaching is also explained as going a step further<sup>2</sup>. Suppose one's fellow committed an act that was a sin. In that case, we must assume that he committed it either unintentionally or accidentally. In that manner, we are also judging him favorably.

The Alter Rebbe offers a similar explanation<sup>3</sup> to a Mishnah, which is taught further on in Pirkei Avos<sup>4</sup>. "Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place." He writes that "it is literally 'his place' (meaning his physical environment) that causes him to sin. (What does this mean; why should *his place* cause him to sin?) In order to sustain himself, he must go about the market all day. He is among those who spend their time sitting at the street-corners. His eyes see all sorts of temptations, and 'what the eyes see, the heart desires<sup>5</sup>.'"

What the Tanya is teaching us is that even if one misbehaves, we must look for a way to justify and explain his actions. We must try to find an explanation for his conduct.

**Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah**

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1. See the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.  
2. See the commentary of the Rambam to this Mishnah.  
3. See Tanya, Chapter 30.  
4. Chapter 2, Mishnah 4.  
5. The Alter Rebbe makes it perfectly clear that he cannot excuse himself based on this logic. It is incumbent upon each of us to refrain from sinning in spite of the difficulties involved.

## PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Based on the above explanation, we must understand our Mishnah's language. Why are we told to judge our fellow favorably? The idea of the Mishnah seems to be *not* to judge him *unfavorably*. Had the Mishnah taught us that, it would have sufficed.

### The Explanation

Hashem only demands of each of us that which we are capable of fulfilling<sup>6</sup>. Hence, the fact that an individual is trapped in a difficult test proves that he is capable of overcoming these obstacles. Despite being in "the market all day ... and of those who sit at the street-corners ..." he can nonetheless refrain from sinning.

Judging one's fellow favorably actually reveals this additional strength that he was given. Seeing him in a good light helps him to pass all tests without succumbing to sin. Therefore, the Mishnah cannot merely tell us not to judge him unfavorably. We must go beyond that and judge him favorably, enabling him to succeed in his mission, bringing Moshiach now.

*Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Emor, 5742)*

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## Chapter II

Likkutei Sichos Volume 13, Pages 114 - 121

### Chapter II

פרק ב', משנה י"ב: רבי יוסי אומר: ... והתקן עצמך ללמוד תורה, שאינה ירושה לך ...

**Chapter 2, Mishnah 12:** Rabbi Yossi would say, ... Perfect yourself to prepare for the study of Torah, for it is not an inheritance to you ...

### The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah is teaching that even if Torah study is a part of one's family legacy, he should not expect it to come to him quickly. Instead, he must exert himself to acquire Torah<sup>7</sup>. The Talmud teaches us that<sup>8</sup> "if one is himself a scholar, and his son is a scholar, and his son's son is a scholar as well, the Torah will never cease from his descendants." The Talmud goes on to say that "the Torah *seeks* its home." This would seem to imply that the Torah is indeed an inheritance. However, the Mishnah is teaching that the only way to gain knowledge of the Torah is by toiling in it.

6. See the Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah, 12, 3; "I only demand according to their ability.

7. See the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.

8. See Talmud Bava Metzia 85, a.

## PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

### Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Tifferes Yisroel asks<sup>9</sup> that we find that<sup>10</sup> "the Torah which Moshe commanded us is an inheritance of the house of Yaakov." We see clearly in the Torah itself that it is an inheritance. How can the Mishnah write that "it is not an inheritance for you?"

### The Explanation

There are various aspects of the bond between Jews and the Torah. Torah is indeed an inheritance, as quoted above. As such, it is the property of every Jew, without exception. Inheritance does not depend on the circumstances or the age of the one who receives it. Even a newborn baby can acquire property through inheritance. That is why each Jew, without exception, is obligated to study Torah.

There is another aspect, which is called a sale, as we find that<sup>11</sup> "the Holy One blessed be He said to the Jews, 'I have *sold* you My Torah.'" This refers to the acquisition of the knowledge of Torah. To make a purchase, one must pay something in exchange for the object which he buys. The same is true of Torah knowledge; the only way to achieve this is by exerting oneself with great effort<sup>12</sup>.

It is regarding this aspect that the Mishnah says that "it is not an inheritance for you." We cannot expect to inherit Torah knowledge. We must use our minds to delve into the Torah and understand it, each of us, to the best of our ability.

*Adapted from the Sichah of the Second Day of Shavuos, 5724)*

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

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9. See his commentary to our Mishnah.

10. Parshas Berochoh, Devorim 33:4.

11. See Midrash, Shemos Rabbah 33, 1.

12. See Likkutei Sichos there at length, where a third aspect of acquiring Torah is discussed, that of a present. There are parts of Torah which transcend our understanding. These we cannot *purchase*. We can only attain them as a present from Hashem.

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