

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek III & IV

16 Elul, 5780 – September 5, 2020

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

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn

A Project of
Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
Copyright 2020©

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

Sefer Hasichos 5751, Volume 2, Pages 507 - 510

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 ben Mahalalel would say, "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. 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; and 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

In our Mishnah, Akavia ben Mahalalel is teaching us how to avoid sin¹. His method is to reflect upon three specific things. By dwelling upon the fact that he comes from a putrid drop, one can be saved from vanity. Haughtiness, i.e., thinking that he is the most crucial person in the world, can cause one to regard his own will as being more critical than G-d's. Dwelling on one's humble source brings him to the realization that there is no real cause for vanity.

Thinking into the fact that he will ultimately end up in a place of dust, maggots and worms will save him from physical and material desires. These desires all too often bring a person to sin. The realization of the end of the physical and material can curb these desires.

Finally, the realization that one will have to account for each of his actions, regardless of how silly they are, is a great deterrent to sin. This will certainly bring one to improve his deeds, thereby avoiding the embarrassment of "owning up" to them.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We know that the Mishnah is very frugal with its wording; it says everything in the shortest possible way. What reason is there for the Mishnah to say that one must "reflect on *three* things" to avoid sin? Why specify the number three? The Mishnah immediately enumerates the three things!

¹. This explanation of the Mishnah is based upon the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

The Explanation

One explanation is that the statement of "reflecting upon three things" to stay far away from sin, is a separate clause in the Mishnah. It stands alone and does not serve to introduce the three things which the Mishnah lists further on. Instead, it alludes to three fundamental thoughts that enable a Jew to fulfill his purpose in life.

Just what are these three things? The Talmud says, discussing the purpose of man's creation, that² "I was created to serve my Creator." Based on this, when one begins serving G-d, he only sees *two* things, 1. Himself, and 2. Hashem. The Mishnah is teaching that reflecting upon these two things does not suffice. He must also dwell upon the world which Hashem created. It is only by serving Hashem in, and by means of this world, that we can fulfill His intention of creation; "Hashem desired to have a dwelling place below³."

It is only by reflecting upon all three things that a Jew can fulfill his purpose in life. It is not enough to make a dwelling place for Hashem within himself, his body, and his animal soul. Instead, each Jew must refine and transform his portion in this world into a dwelling place for G-d. Through this service, we will bring about the complete and true redemption now!

Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim, 13 Iyar, 5742)

Chapter IV

Sefer Hasichos 5749, Volume 2, Pages 642 - 645

Chapter IV

פרק ד', משנה ב': בן עזאי אומר: הוי רץ למצווה קלה כחמורה, ובורח מן העבירה. שמצווה גוררת מצווה, ועבירה גוררת עבירה. ששכר מצווה - מצווה. ושכר עבירה - עבירה.

Chapter 4, Mishnah 2: Ben Azzai would say, "One must run to pursue (even) a minor Mitzvah, and run away from sin. For a Mitzvah brings another Mitzvah, and sin brings another sin. For the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah, and the reward of sin is sin."

The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah's statement that "the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah" can be explained in the following two ways⁴.

1. When a person fulfills one Mitzvah, Divine providence assures that he is given the opportunity to

². Talmud Kiddushin 82, b.

³. See Tanya Chapter 36. The original source of this is the Midrash Tanchumah Naso 16.

⁴. This explanation is based on the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

fulfill others⁵. Hashem does this to increase the reward and pleasure which he receives from the fulfillment of Mitzvos.

2. The benefits a person receives by performing Mitzvos, and the pleasure which he derives from them, are considered Mitzvos in their own right.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

True payment, or reward, must be proportionate to the services which were rendered. That being the case, how is it ever possible to reward a Jew for Mitzvah observance? Mitzvos accomplish something truly incredible; Hashem Himself "enjoys" them, as so to speak! This is in keeping with Rashi's statement in the Torah⁶ that Hashem says (as so to speak) that "This sacrifice gives Me pleasure, for I spoke, and My will was fulfilled!" What possible reward can be enough for the observance of even one Mitzvah?

The Explanation

The answer to this question can be understood from our Mishnah. The meaning of the Hebrew word Mitzvah is a commandment. However, it is also related to the Aramaic word "Tzavso⁷," meaning attachment or connection. As a result of performing a Mitzvah, we become connected with the Almighty, Who commanded the fulfillment of the Mitzvah. This is the one reward, or consequence, of performing a Mitzvah, which is proportionate to the "services rendered" by a Jew.

This being the case, why do we find the promise of physical rewards for performing Mitzvos throughout the Torah? The Rambam answers this question⁸. "... What is the meaning of the statements made throughout the entire Torah that by observing the Torah, you will acquire such and such? ... We are promised by the Torah that if we fulfill it with joy and good spirit, and meditate on its wisdom at all times, Hashem will remove all of the obstacles which prevent us from fulfilling it, such as sickness, war, famine, and the like ..."

May we merit the ultimate reward of the complete and true redemption now!

Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Eikev, 18 Menachem Av, 5749)

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

To dedicate a week, a month or a year of

The Rashi of the Week or Pirkei Avos of the Week, visit

<http://rebbeteachersrashi.org/contact-us-dedicate-an-issue>

You can find us on the web at www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org.

You can find our blog at <https://rebbetr.org>.

⁵. This obviously does not detract from his free choice. He is granted the opportunity to fulfill other Mitzvos from Above. Whether or not he uses that opportunity is his choice.

⁶. Rashi's comments to Parshas Vayikroh, Vayikroh 1, 9.

⁷. See Likkutei Torah, Parshas Bechukosai, Page 45, c.

⁸. Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah, Chapter 9, 1.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of Tzivos Hashem **Chaim** and **Aiden Oded** שיזניו **Morris**

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M.** and **Chaya Mushka** שיזניו **Morris**

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

*** * ***

לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס