

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek I

11 Sivan, 5781 – May 22, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos

Chapter I

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos Volume 17, Page 347 - 355

Chapter I, Mishnah 15

פרק א', משנה ט"ו: שמאי אומר: "עשה תורתך קבע ... הוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות:

Chapter 1, Mishnah 15: Shammai would say: "Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life ... and greet everyone with a pleasant face."

The Simple Explanation

The Bartenura offers an obvious explanation of this Mishnah. "*Make Torah study a permanent fixture of your life*" means that Torah should be your primary occupation day and night. When you are exhausted from learning, and your mind is no longer clear, that is the time to be occupied in business¹. "*Greeting everyone with a pleasant face*" refers to everyone without exception, including gentiles. It even applies to guests in your house, who you are feeding and giving lodging. If you give someone the very best food, drink, and accommodations but treat them in a grumpy and irritable manner, it is considered if you haven't given them anything.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The first part of our Mishnah teaches us about Torah study. In other words, it is discussing serving Hashem with our intellect, i.e., our brain. Studying Torah requires *understanding* what we learn. In contrast to this, the second part of our Mishnah, greeting *all* others without exception in a friendly manner, requires serving Hashem with emotion, i.e., the heart².

It is explained in Chassidus³ that the service of Hashem with the brain and the heart are not only different; they are opposites. Practically expressing one's emotions requires the presence of

1. As we have explained many times, Pirkei Avos teaches one to be a Chossid, meaning that it teaches us to go beyond the letter of the law. Everyone must set aside time to study Torah every day, during the day and at night. However, Shammai's teaching does not necessarily apply to all of us.

2. Loving one's fellow is one of the 613 commandments of the Torah. Moreover, based on Hillel's famous teaching, this includes the entire Torah (Tractate Shabbos 31, a). However, this, as is the case with all Mitzvos, stem from emotion. One performs positive commandments because he loves G-d. Likewise one refrains from transgressing negative commandments because he fears, or is in awe of Hashem.

3. See the Chassidic Discourses of the year 1906, beginning with Page 111. See also Sefer Hamaamorim Kuntreisim Volume 2, beginning with Page 596.

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another person. Likewise, one cannot fear without having someone else to fear. However, solitude is an advantage for intellect. When one is alone, it is possible to think about something in-depth. Only in that manner can he attain a thorough understanding of a concept⁴. How can there possibly be a connection between the two?

Moreover, from our Mishnah, it seems that the first part follows the second. The first step is making Torah a permanent fixture, and from that, we come to greeting everyone and anyone cheerfully. How can this be?

The Explanation

To answer this question, the Mishnah begins by telling us that "Shammai would say," meaning this Mishnah is telling us Shammai's teachings. What is expressed by Shammai? We are told in Tehillim that⁵ "I will place (נשמ – 'vesom') the way." The Gemorah explains this as follows⁶. "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says, that this verse refers to one who appraises his ways⁷." The Alter Rebbe explains in Likkutei Torah⁸ that based on this, the name Shammai is related to appraising, meaning evaluating.

This name teaches that every Jew is required to evaluate all of his paths constantly. He must assess all of the strengths which Hashem gave him. By accurately measuring and thereby appreciating his G-d-given abilities, one realizes that his potential is greater than he initially thought. He can go far beyond what he thought he could. He can succeed to the utmost in Torah study, "making Torah a permanent fixture of his life." At the same time, he is capable of growing in Mitzvah observance most

4. Further on it does say (Pirkei Avos Chapter 6, 6) that Torah can be acquired by "companionship with one's contemporaries and debating with one's students." This seems to imply that being with others is helpful for Torah study. However, this only refers to others who are also involved in Torah study. It certainly is not related to greeting *everyone* in a friendly manner.

5. Tehillim 50:23.

6. Tractate Moed Kattan, 5, a.

7. The Hebrew word can either be read "vesom," which means to place, or "veshom," which means to appraise, evaluate or measure.

8. Shir Hashirim 48, c.

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meticulously, "greeting everyone with a cheerful face." Even though these two appear to be mutually exclusive, he will discover that he can succeed at both by honestly appraising himself.

This idea is the focus of Pirkei Avos, namely, going beyond the letter of the law and the limitations of human intellect. In this manner, we will indeed bring Moshiach now!

(Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Shemini, 5735)

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

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