

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Chapter Six

27 Menachem Av, 5784 – August 31, 2024

Compiled from the works of
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PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

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. You shall do more than you study¹. Do not desire the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs. Your employer is faithful in paying you for the rewards of your work.

The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah² 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 teaching focuses on the importance of Torah study.

"Do not seek greatness for yourself" means not to run after leadership positions. "Do not desire honor" teaches us that one who wishes to receive honor for his Torah knowledge appears to be studying for ulterior motives. "Do more than you study" tells us that your Mitzvah observance must outweigh your Torah study. This is in keeping with the teaching that³ "one whose deeds are greater than his wisdom can be compared to a tree with many roots and few branches. All the storms 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 you will receive for Torah study⁴.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We must understand why one involved with Torah study would desire a king's table! This is rendered much more difficult by the order in which these teachings are listed. First, we are told

1. Literally, "More than you study, do."

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

3. Pirkei Avos, Chapter 3, Mishnah 17.

4. The above is the explanation of the Bartenura.

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neither to seek greatness nor to desire honor. Only then are we taught not to desire sitting at a royal table. One not interested in honor would not want a king's table!

However, how the Sages express this makes it seem as if a royal table in and of itself is not something negative. We are taught that not wanting it is because "your table is greater than theirs." If not for that, there might be a reason to desire a king's table.

The Explanation

The Sages teach us that Pirkei Avos teaches one to be a Chossid. The meaning of the word "Chossid" in this context goes beyond what the letter of the law requires⁵. Hence, the same is true of the teachings contained in Avos regarding the acquisition of the Torah. We are discussing one whose toil in Torah study is beyond what might ordinarily be expected. Granted, he does enjoy learning the Torah. However, his exertion is far greater than it would be were his studies purely for the pleasure which he derives.

This is in keeping with the teaching of our Mishnah to "do more than you study." We explained that the deed expressed here refers to Mitzvah performance: "One's deeds must be greater than his wisdom." That is true. However, it is also possible to explain this differently. We understand that the deed referred to here *is* the Torah study itself. The Mishnah says that one should force oneself to study beyond that which he may naturally be accustomed to.

The Torah makes a specific promise to one who studies in this manner. The Torah states that⁶ "If you follow My statutes," which means⁷ "that you toil in the study of Torah," the result will be that you shall receive the most significant rewards⁸; "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, one who toils in Torah study is assured of obtaining all of his physical needs. This means that he controls rules over the world. This is why the Sages say, "Who are our kings? Our rabbis⁹."

That is why the Mishnah teaches us not to desire the table of kings. One who *toils* in the Torah, meaning that he 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

5. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

6. Parshas Bechukosai, Vayikroh 26:3.

7. See Rashi's commentary *ibid*.

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

9. See the Talmud Gittin 62, a.

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the physical, material world. On the contrary, one must use this physical world to elevate it to holiness. However, one must not desire or take pleasure from the physical for its own sake¹⁰.

However, this begs the question, why should one *not* want the king's table? Elevating the world to G-dliness is an integral part of our mission. As the Mishnah continues, the explanation is that "your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs." The connection with Hashem, which can be achieved through Torah study, is far greater than anything one can attain through elevating the physical¹¹. However, we must be involved with both the Divine and the material. In this manner, we will fulfill Hashem's desire to have a dwelling place in this world. Thereby, we will bring the complete and true redemption now.

Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, 5722)

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

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10. See Tanya, the beginning of Chapter 7.

11. See Tanya Chapter 5.

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