

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek VI

6 Elul, 5781 – August 14, 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 VI

Sefer Hasichos, 5749 Volume 2, Pages 481 - 482

פרק ו', משנה א': שנו חכמים בלשון המשנה, ברוך שבהר בהם ובמשנתם. רבי מאיר אומר: כל העוסק בתורה לשמה, זוכה לדברים הרבה ...

Chapter 6, Mishnah¹ 1: The Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah (blessed is He who chose them and their learning): Rabbi Mayer would (often) say, "Whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits many things ... "

The Simple Explanation

This week we learn the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos. It begins with the words "the Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah." This tells us that this chapter is not Mishnah. Instead, it is a collection of teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah, written in the same language.

The Mishnayos of Pirkei Avos consists of five chapters. Later, the Rabbis added the sixth chapter and called it "Kinyan Torah – the Acquisition of Torah." The reason for this is because the entire chapter discusses the importance and greatness of Torah study. Some say that they added it because of the custom to learn/recite one chapter of Avos each week between the festival of Pesach and Shavuos. There are six weeks. Hence we need to have six chapters. It is essential to learn *this* chapter which teaches us how to acquire the Torah on the Shabbos immediately preceding Shavuos (and the Ten Days of Teshuvah) when we celebrate the giving of the Torah^{2 3}.

1. I am using the term "Mishnah – משנה" in both the Hebrew and the English in order to maintain consistency with the earlier chapters. As we shall see in the explanation, it is not an actual Mishnah. Rather this chapter consists of teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah. However, they were not included in the Mishnah's canon.

2. See the commentary of the Midrash Shmuel to this Beraysah.

3. There are actually two customs regarding when Pirkei Avos is to be learned. The Alter Rebbe writes in his Siddur (before Pirkei Avos which follows the Shabbos afternoon service) as follows. "It is customary to recite one chapter of Pirkei Avos each Shabbos between Pesach and Shavuos at the afternoon service ... There are those who follow this custom each Shabbos of the summer." According to the first custom, we can understand the reason for adding this particular chapter on the sixth (and final) week. It immediately precedes the giving of the Torah. However, according to the second custom why read chapter six on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah? It may be possible to explain that Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the "Ten Days of Teshuvah." These days come to a conclusion on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is also the time of receiving the Torah, inasmuch as we then received the second set of tablets.

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Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi edited the Mishnah and decided what to include. The teachings in this chapter are called Beraysos, which stems from the Aramaic term "Bar," meaning outside. They are "outside the canon of the Mishnah. However, the Sages wrote them in the same language as the Mishnah⁴. This includes both the language itself and the style in which they are written. The Mishnah and the Beraysos are both written in Hebrew. This contrasts the Gemorah, which explains the Mishnah and often quotes Beraysos. The language of the Gemorah is Aramaic. Additionally, the style of the Mishnah and the Beraysos are similar; they are both written in very terse and concise language. Furthermore, the teachings in this chapter are fit to be called Mishnah; they are equal in stature to the Mishnayos⁵.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The fact that Beraysos are written in the same language, and linguistic style as the Mishnayos is not only true of this chapter. It is the case throughout the Talmud. There are Beraysos throughout the entire Talmud. Yet we find no other place where the Sages declare the greatness of a Beraysoh. Of all sixty-three tractates of the Talmud, why did the Sages choose Pirkei Avos alone to let us know the stature of a Beraysoh? Here alone, the Midrash Shmuel states that "they are equal in stature to the Mishnayos."

The Explanation

We can answer this question from the question itself. As mentioned above, the word Beraysoh comes from the Aramaic word "outside." On a deeper level, the word "outside" conveys something very positive. We are taking the teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah and transporting them to somewhere *seemingly* outside the realm of Torah.

This is a fundamental part of the entire Torah. On the one hand, Torah is⁶ a "secret treasure, which you had hidden... before You created the world." However, the Torah also⁷ "descended from its place of glory ... and progressively descended through hidden stages, stage after stage, with the descent of the worlds, until it clothed itself in physical objects and this-worldly things." Despite this tremendous descent, it retains its essence. Even in this corporal, physical world, it remains Hashem's

I have written this as a footnote rather than including it in the text because the Rebbe did not include it in this talk. However, the Sages teach us that Yom Kippur is the day on which we received the second tablets. See also the Rebbe's discourse *Lehovin Inyan Simchas Torah* 5742.

4. See the commentary of the Bartenura to this Beraysoh.

5. See the commentary of the Midrash Shmuel to this Beraysoh.

6. See Talmud Shabbos 88, b.

7. See Tanya Chapter 4.

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Will and Wisdom. There it has the power to elevate and refine this world; we can use the Torah to transform this world into⁸ "a dwelling place for Hashem below."

We see this idea of the Torah "progressively descending through stages" in the very beginning of Pirkei Avos. It begins by telling us that⁹ "Moshe received the Torah from (Hashem at Mount) Sinai and gave it over to Yehoshua. Yehoshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly." The commentaries explain¹⁰ that the Mishnah is telling us the chain of the Torah's transmission.

This chain alludes to the descent of the Torah throughout all of the generations of history. Due to the decline of the stature of the ages, it is incumbent upon us to become increasingly scrupulous regarding Torah and Mitzvos. The further the generations are from the giving of the Torah, the more care is needed to preserve its integrity. Therefore, the first Mishnah concludes by telling us¹¹ to "make a fence around the Torah," Ceaseless vigilance is the one way that we can be sure to maintain our connection to Torah. Hence, the Sages of ensuing generations enacted laws, "fences," to assure the preservation of the Torah. The fact is that these "fences" have the same power as the Torah itself, which "Moshe received from Mount Sinai¹²."

This same idea, hinted at, at the beginning of Pirkei Avos, is also alluded to at its conclusion. These Beraysos are *outside* the corpus of the Mishnah. Nevertheless, they were "taught by the Sages in the language of the Mishnah." This is to demonstrate that they are the equivalent of the Mishnah. They have the same force as the rest of the Torah, which "Moshe received from Mount Sinai."

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Mevorchim Hachodesh and Erev Rosh Chodesh
Sivan, 5749)*

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

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8. Midrash Tanchumah Parshas Naso, 16, among other sources.

9. See Pirkei Avos Chapter 1, Mishnah 1.

10. See Midrash Shmuel at the beginning of Pirkei Avos.

11. See footnote 9.

12. See Rambam Laws of Mamrim (Rebellious Ones) Chapter 1, Paragraph 2 and Chapter 2, Paragraph

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

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נדפס ע"י בנה

ר' גרשון שי' בן טוב