

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek VI

Elul 2, 5783 – August 19, 2023
Shnas Hakhel

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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**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. More than you study, do. Do not desire the Table of Kings. Your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs. Your Employer is faithful to pay you for the rewards of your work.

The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah¹ is part of the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos, referred to as "Kinyan Torah – Acquiring the Torah." As is the case with the entire chapter, they are teachings that focus on the importance of Torah study.

"Do not seek greatness for yourself," do not run after leadership positions. "Do not desire honor," one who wishes honor for his Torah knowledge appears to be studying for ulterior motives. "More than you study, do." Your Mitzvah observance must outweigh your Torah study. This is in keeping with the teaching that²"one whose deeds are greater than his wisdom is like a tree with many roots and few branches. All the storms in the world 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 study³.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We must understand why one involved with Torah study would desire a king's table! The order in which the Mishnah lists these teachings renders this question much more difficult. First, the Mishnah tells us to neither seek greatness nor desire honor. Only then are we taught not to choose to sit at a royal table. One not interested in honor would not care about a king's table!

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

2. Pirkei Avos, Chapter 3, Mishnah 17.

3. The above is the explanation of the Bartenura.

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However, from the Mishnah, it seems that a royal table is not all that bad. The Mishnah teaches us that the reason not to desire it is because "your table is greater than theirs." It would seem as if, otherwise, there might be a reason to want 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 means going beyond what the letter of the law requires⁴. Hence, Avos's teachings regarding the Torah's acquisition are the same. We are discussing one whose toil in Torah study is way beyond what one might expect. Granted, he enjoys learning Torah; however, his exertion is far greater than it would be were his studies purely for the pleasure he derives.

This is in keeping with the words of the Mishnah, "More than you study, do." 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 it differently. The deed referred to here can be Torah study itself. The Mishnah says that one should force oneself to study beyond that to which he may naturally be accustomed.

The Torah makes a specific promise to one who studies in this manner. The Torah states, "If you follow My statutes," which means⁵ "that you toil in the study of Torah." The result of this will be that you shall receive the most significant rewards⁶; "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, he will surely obtain all of his physical needs. This means that he controls and rules over the world. This is why the Sages say the answer to the question, "Who are our kings?" is the rabbis⁷.

That is why the Mishnah teaches us not to desire the table of kings. One who *toils* in Torah and 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 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 sake⁸.

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. The explanation is that "your table is greater

4. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

5. See Rashi's commentary *ibid*.

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

7. See the Talmud Gittin 62, a.

8. See Tanya, the beginning of Chapter 7.

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than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs." The connection with Hashem, which one can achieve through Torah study, is far greater than anything one can attain through elevating the physical⁹. However, we must be involved with both. 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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9. See Tanya Chapter 5.

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