

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek III

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 III**

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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 the son of Mahalalel would say, “Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of sin. Know from where you came, where you are going and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. From where you came; from a putrid drop. Where you are going; to a place of dust, maggots and worms. Before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting; before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

The Simple Explanation

This Mishnah teaches us methods for avoiding sin. It actually goes beyond that. By following the teachings of this Mishnah, one can even go beyond distancing oneself from sin. It is possible to even avoid “the hands of sin;” to remain distant from anything which can lead to sin.

By reflecting that one comes from a putrid drop, he will not succumb to haughtiness. Dwelling on this removes the tendency to be vain; there is no cause to feel superior. Vanity is a common cause of sin. If one considers himself the “center of the universe,” there is nothing to prevent him from doing whatever he wants.

Reflection upon the end of one's physical body, “a place of dust, maggots and worms,” helps to eliminate the traits of chasing physical desires and running after money. After all, what point is there to accumulating wealth¹?

Likewise, contemplating that one must ultimately give a “judgement and accounting” for

1. It is obvious that the soul of a Jew, which is from where he really comes, is an actual part of Hashem (see Tanya Chapter 2, as we shall see further). Similarly, a Jewish soul ascends to the highest levels to bask in G-d's presence. However, for the purpose of distancing oneself from sin it is beneficial to reflect upon the beginning and the end (albeit a temporary end – there will be a resurrection of the dead) of the body.

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all of his actions will help to keep his actions in check².

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Mishnah teaches us to contemplate the fact that we will ultimately need to give a “judgement and accounting” of our actions in this lifetime. This expression requires explanation. When an individual is facing trial, he must first offer an accounting of the actions for which he is being tried. Once his accounting is complete, the judge issues a verdict. The “accounting” comes before the “judgement.” We need to understand why the Mishnah says “judgement and accounting.” Accounting and judgement would appear to be the correct order.

The Answer

We can understand this based on the Baal Shem Tov’s explanation³ of a different Mishnah in Pirkei Avos⁴. The Mishnah says that “... the collectors make their rounds every day and exact payment from man, (both) with his knowledge and without his knowledge ...” Hashem causes a person to be punished for his actions (payment is exacted from him) based on a verdict which he himself renders (*with his knowledge*). He himself issues the verdict for his own sin. How does this come about?

One who is standing in judgement before the Heavenly Court is told of a person who committed an infraction similar to that which he himself had performed. He is not told that in actuality he is judging himself (the judgement is being done *without his knowledge*). The individual is then given the punishment which *he himself* decided upon. This explains the order of the phrase “judgement and accounting.” First comes the individual’s own “judgement” of his infraction. Only then is there the “accounting;” demonstrating that he actually did commit the very same sin.

The order of the two parts of the expression is now clear. However, the reason for the necessity of reaching a conclusion as to the person’s judgement in this seemingly round-about manner is still difficult to understand. One would think that the angels who adjudicate in the Heavenly Court are capable of reaching a verdict on their own, without any help!

The explanation is, that each Jewish soul is “an actual part of Hashem above⁵.” G-d is a perfect unity; He is one essential being. The Baal Shem Tov taught that⁶ “when one grasps part of

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

3. This explanation is brought in Likkutei Maharan, Chapter 113.

4. Pirkei Avos Chapter 3, Mishnah 16.

5. The quotation is from Iyov 31:2. Tanya, at the beginning of Chapter 2 adds the word “actual.”

6. This is quoted in the Chassidic discourse of 5ver 666, Page 522.

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the essence, he is grasping the entire essence.” This means that within each Jew there is found the essence of G-d Almighty Himself! It is because of this that a creation has neither the right nor the ability to judge a Jew. This includes even the ministering angels! Since it is not possible to judge a Jew, he must issue the judgement upon himself.

This teaches us a number of lessons. We see from this the greatness of every Jew. No matter what he looks like, he contains the essence of Hashem. Additionally, it teaches us how important it is to never judge any Jew in a less than positive light. We may actually be casting aspersions upon ourselves (G-d forbid). Through this love of every fellow Jew, we will certainly merit Moshiach now!

(Adapted from a talk given on Yud Shevat, 5720)

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Pirkei Avos of the Week, visit

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**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיקחי Morris**

*

**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיקחי Morris**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Yehuda Kalman שי Laufer**
On the occasion of his Bris, Iyar 7, 5778

*

Dedicated by his parents
Rabbi **Eli** and Mrs. **Musia שיקחי Laufer**

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR MOTHER
Mrs. **Brocha** bas Reb **Tzvi Nechemiah** Hacoheh ע"ה **Cohen**
Passed away on 8 Shevat, 5778
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY

* * *

IN HONOR OF
Mr. **Sholom Moshe** Hacoheh ben **Tzivia שי Cohen**
For a complete and speedy recovery

* * *

DEDICATED BY
Hatomim **Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי Mars**

*

May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

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לזכות

החייל ב"צבאות השם" יהודה קלמן שי' לויפער
לרגל היכנסו בכריתו של אאע"ה ביום ז' אייר ה'תשע"ח

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נדפס ע"י הוריו

הרה"ת ר' אלי' חיים וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו

לויפער

* * *

לעילוי נשמת

מרת ברכה בת ר' צבי נחמי' הכהן ע"ה כהן

נפטר ביום ח' שבט, ה'תשע"ח

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

נדפס ע"י בני משפחתה שיחיו

* * *

לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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נתרם ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מאריס

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן