

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek IV

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 IV

Sefer Hasichos 5749, Volume 2, Beginning with Page 642

Chapter IV

פרק ד', משנה ב': בן עזאי אומר, הוי רץ למצווה קלה כחמורה, ובורח מן העבירה. שמצווה גוררת מצווה, ועבירה גוררת עבירה. ששכר מצווה - מצווה. ושכר עבירה - עבירה.

Chapter 4, Mishnah 2: Ben Azzai would (often) say, “Chase after (even) a minor Mitzvah, and run away from a transgression. For a Mitzvah brings another Mitzvah, and a transgression brings another transgression. For the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah, and the reward of transgression is transgression.

The Simple Explanation

What does Ben Azzai mean when he says that the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah? One's actions condition him to behave in a certain manner. Mitzvah performance accustoms oneself to continue performing Mitzvos. Likewise, performing sinful actions accustom one to continue transgressing. This is in keeping with the words of the Sages¹, that “if one comes to defile himself, the doors are opened for him. However, if one comes to purify himself, he is helped (from above).” An additional explanation is that the “reward,” the pleasure which one feels from performing a Mitzvah is itself a Mitzvah².

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Mishnah is telling us the reward which one receives for the performance of a Mitzvah. This seems to present us with a great difficulty. The reward one receives for performing a job must be commiserate with said job. How can any reward, whether physical or spiritual, be sufficient for the fulfillment of a Divine command? Each Mitzvah is G-d's will! As such, the act of a Mitzvah brings “pleasure” (as so to speak) to Hashem! The Sages teach us³ that “this gives Me pleasure, for I said (My commandment), and My will was fulfilled!” Furthermore, there is an opinion that a Jewish worker must be paid more than the value of his actual work⁴.

1. See Talmud Yoma 38, b.

2. See Bartenura Chapter 4, Mishnah 2.

3. See Rashi's comments to Vayikroh 1:9.

4. See Mishnah Bava Metzia Chapter 7, Mishna 1.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Additionally, further on in Avos the Sages teach us that⁵ “... a single moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is greater than all of the World to Come ...” If even one moment of Mitzvah performance in this world is greater than all of the World to Come, what possible reward can there be for a lifetime of learning Torah and observing Mitzvos?

The Answer

This can be answered based on the Alter Rebbe’s translation of the word Mitzvah⁶. The simple meaning of the word Mitzvah is the Hebrew “commandment.” The Alter Rebbe explains that it has a deeper meaning; it is derived from the Aramaic word meaning connection. Through fulfilling a Mitzvah, one develops a special bond with Hashem. The very fact that Hashem commands us to do something forms a unique and powerful bond between the Jew, and the One who commanded him⁷ to perform a certain act.

We can now understand why “the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah.” Each time I perform a Mitzvah I become closer to Hashem. This closeness is a tremendous reward in and of itself. Not only that, but the bond created by Mitzvah performance helps me to perform more and more Mitzvos.

Based on this, we need to understand why the Torah promises us all sorts of physical and material rewards for Mitzvah observance. One small example is that the Torah tells us the reward we will receive for toiling in Torah study and fulfilling Mitzvos⁸. “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. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your food to satiety, and you will live in security in your land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten you; I will remove wild beasts from the Land, and no army will pass through your land ...” How can this, or any material reward for that manner, compensate us for fulfilling Mitzvos?

This can be understood from the following words of the Rambam⁹. ... we are promised by the Torah that if we fulfill it with joy and good spirit and constantly reflect on its wisdom, Hashem

5. Pirkei Avos Chapter 4, Mishnah 17.

6. Likkutei Torah Parshas Bechukosai 45, 3.

7. We find the same idea in the English language. To “enjoin” one to do something means to issue a command. At the same time, the word “enjoin” is also related to the word “join,” meaning connect.

8. Vayikroh 26:4-6.

9. Rambam Laws of Teshuvah Chapter 9, Paragraph 1.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

will remove all the' obstacles which prevent us from fulfilling it, for example, sickness, war, famine, and the like. Similarly, He will grant us all the good which will reinforce our performance of the Torah, such as plenty, peace, an abundance of silver and gold in order that we have no need to be constantly involved in matters required by the body. Rather, we will sit unburdened and study wisdom and perform Mitzvos ...”

In other words, the Rambam is explaining that the physical rewards which the Torah promises are a means, not an end. It is true that no amount of reward would suffice as reward for our Mitzvos. However, once we demonstrate our dedication to Torah study and the fulfillment of Mitzvos, G-d makes our lives easier. This is done in order to unburden us, thereby allowing us to observe Torah and Mitzvos to an even greater extent, with even more energy.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Eikev, 18 Menachem Av, 5748)

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

*

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

* * *

**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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לעילוי נשמת

מרת ברכה בת ר' צבי נחמי' הכהן ע"ה כהן

נפטר ביום ח' שבט, ה'תשע"ח

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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נדפס ע"י בני משפחתה שיחיו

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לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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נתרם ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מארס

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