

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek I & II

14 Elul, 5779 – September 14, 2019

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 I

Likkutei Sichos Volume 27, Pages 164 - 166

Chapter I

פרק א', משנה ו': יהושע בן פרחיה ונתאי הארבלי קיבלו מהם. יהושע בן פרחיה אומר: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר, והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

Chapter 1, Mishnah 6: Yehoshua ben Perachia and Nitai Ho'arbeili received from them. Yehoshua ben Perachia would say, "Assume a master for yourself, acquire a friend for yourself, and judge every man favorably."

The Simple Explanation

Our Mishnah quotes three teachings from Yehoshua ben Perachia. We will focus on the third teaching, to "judge every man favorably." There are commentaries who explain this in the following manner¹. Suppose that one performed an action which can be explained in two possible manners. It is possible to assume that he did something which was improper. However, one can also interpret his actions as having been good. The Mishnah is teaching us, that in this instance a "Chossid," one who goes beyond the letter of the law, must assume that his fellow's act was a good one.

This teaching is also explained as going a step further². Suppose one's fellow committed an act which was clearly a sin. In that case, we must assume that he committed it either unintentionally or accidentally. In that manner we are also judging him favorably.

The Alter Rebbe offers a similar explanation³ to a Mishnah which is taught further on in Pirkei Avos⁴. "Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place." He writes that "it is literally 'his place' (meaning his physical environment) that causes him to sin. (What does this mean; why should *his place* cause him to sin?) In order to sustain himself he must go about the market all day. He is among those who spend their time sitting at the street-corners. His eyes see all sorts of temptations, and 'what the eyes see, the heart desires⁵.'"

What the Tanya is teaching us, is that even if one behaves improperly, we must look for a way to justify and explain his actions. We must try to find an explanation for his conduct.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

Based on the above explanation, we must understand our Mishnah's language. Why are we told to judge our fellow favorably? The idea of the Mishnah seems to be *not* to judge him *unfavorably*. Had the Mishnah taught us that,

1. See the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura.

2. See the commentary of the Rambam to this Mishnah.

3. See Tanya, Chapter 30.

4. Chapter 2, Mishnah 4.

5. The Alter Rebbe makes it perfectly clear that he cannot excuse himself based on this logic. It is incumbent upon each of us to refrain from sinning in spite of the difficulties involved.

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it would have sufficed.

The Explanation

Hashem only demands of each of us that which we are capable of fulfilling⁶. Hence, the fact that an individual is ensnared in a difficult test proves that he is capable of overcoming these obstacles. Despite being in “the market all day ... and of those who sit at the street-corners ...” he can nonetheless refrain from sinning.

Judging one’s fellow favorably actually reveals this additional strength which he was given. Seeing him in a good light helps him to pass all tests without succumbing to sin. Therefore, the Mishnah cannot merely tell us not to judge him unfavorably. We must go beyond that and judge him favorably, enabling him to succeed in his mission, bringing Moshiach now.

Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Emor, 5742)

Chapter II

Likkutei Sichos, Volume 4, Pages 1191 - 1196

Chapter II

פרק ב', משנה א': רבי אומר: איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם? ... והוי זהיר במצווה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצווה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עבירה כנגד הפסדה. הסתכל בשלושה דברים ואין אתה בא לידי עבירה: דע מה למעלה ממך – עין רואה, ואוזן שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין.

Chapter 2, Mishnah 1: Rabbi would say, ... “Be as careful with a minor Mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the Mitzvos. Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards, and the rewards of a transgression against its cost. Consider three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression, ‘know what is above from you; a seeing eye, a listening ear, and that all of your deeds being inscribed in a book.’”

The Simple Explanation

This Mishnah contains three teachings which were often said by Rabbi⁷. We will focus on the second and third of these teachings. The Rambam explains these as follows⁸. The Torah does not tell us the reward for fulfilling positive commandments⁹. The reason for this to assure that we observe each Mitzvah equally.

Rabbi continues his teaching by telling us to “consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards ...” Despite the fact that the Torah does not specify a reward for positive commandments, we can understand which Mitzvos have

6. See the Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah, 12, 3; “I only demand according to their ability.

7. The title “Rabbi” always refers to Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi. He was also called Rabbeinu Hakadosh – Our Holy Rabbi.

8. See his Commentary to the Mishnah here.

9. Of all of the positive commandments, there are two exceptions. One is the Mitzvah of honoring one’s parents (Parshas Yisro, Shemos 20:12, and Parshas Vo’eschanan, Devorim 6:16). The other is the commandment to send away a mother bird before taking her young or her eggs (Parshas Ki Teitzei, Devorim.21:6-7).

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greater rewards. We must simply consider the severity of the punishment for a transgression (“the cost of a mitzvah”). Desecrating the Shabbos is a capital offense. Neglecting the performance of circumcision is punishable by *Koreis* – Excision; which is not as severe a punishment. In this manner we can understand that the reward for *keeping* the Shabbos is greater than that which is given for circumcision.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

How can we reconcile Rabbi’s two teachings? First, he tells us that Torah does not tell us the reward for positive commandments. He then teaches us a “workaround.” By looking at the severity of a punishment, you can know the relative greatness of a Mitzvah’s reward as compared to another’s.

The Explanation

There are two types of reward for fulfilling Mitzvos. One is a unique reward for each Mitzvah. Regarding this reward, there is a difference between *minor* and *major* Mitzvos. The greatness of this type of reward can be calculated from the severity of the punishment for neglecting it.

Why is this so? The performance of a Mitzvah *refines* the one who fulfills it¹⁰. Not only that, but it also refines the objects with which the Mitzvos are performed¹¹. In this regard, each Mitzvah is different.

There is also another, greater type of reward for Mitzvos, in which all commandments are equal. Why is this? Because by performing each Mitzvah, one fulfills Hashem’s will. Each Mitzvah has this factor in common.

This answers the question. The difference between the reward for Mitzvos only relates to the amount and type of refinement which they bring about in the world. Regarding this Rabbi Yehudah said to “consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards.”

The reward for fulfilling G-d Almighty’s will is far greater. In this regard each Mitzvah is equal. This is why Rabbi said that “you do not know the rewards of the Mitzvos.” We must therefore apply ourselves equally to all Mitzvos without distinction.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bereishis, 5720)

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10. See the Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis 44, a, “The Mitzvos were given to us in order to refine people.”

11. See Likkutei Torah Parshas Bechukosai 45, c.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR FATHER

Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheן ע"ה **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

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**מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש**

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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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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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