

בס"ד

# PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

## Perek III

Compiled from the works of  
**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**  
**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

by  
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos  
Chapter III**

**Likkutei Sichos, Volume 34, Pages 24 - 31**

**Chapter III**

**פרק ג', משנה ה':** רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי משום רבי מאיר אומר: כל השוכח דבר אחד ממשנתו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו, שנאמר (דברים ד, ט) "רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך." יכול אפילו תקפה עליו משנתו, תלמוד לומר (שם) "ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך," הא אינו מתחייב בנפשו עד שישב ויסירם מלבו.

Rabbi Dusta'i the son of Rabbi Yannai would (frequently) say in the name of Rabbi Meir, "Anyone who forgets even a single word of this learning, the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life. As the Torah says<sup>1</sup>, 'Just be careful, and verily guard your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen.' One might think that this applies also to one who (forgot because) his studies proved too difficult for him; but the verse goes on to tell us<sup>2</sup> 'and lest they be removed from your heart, throughout the days of your life.' Hence, one does not forfeit his life unless he deliberately removes them from his heart."

**The Simple Explanation**

This Mishnah's lesson seems simple enough. If one studies Torah and forgets what he learned<sup>3</sup>, it is as if he has forfeited his life. We need to understand why "forgetting even a single word of one's learning" is such a grave sin. Why should the punishment be that severe?

The explanation is, that being "as if he has forfeited his life" is not a punishment at all. Rather it is cause and effect. Torah is "our life and the length of our days<sup>4</sup>." A direct result of forgetting even one word of his learning, is that he is losing a part of his life. There is no actual, physical death. However, he has lost a part of his life. This is in keeping with the Sages' saying<sup>5</sup>,

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1. Devorim 4:9.

2. Ibid.

3. The Mishnah clarifies that we it is discussing a Torah lesson which the individual understood. The reason for his "forgetfulness," was because he did not review the lesson as he should have.

4. Quoted from the Berochah Ahavas Olam which is recited before Shema in the evening service. This is also in keeping with Rabbi Akiva's analogy to fish (Talmud Berochos 61, b). The water is the place of their life. If they cannot live within the water, they certainly cannot live outside of it. The same is true of Jews and Torah; Torah is the place of our life. We cannot survive without it.

5. See Talmud Bava Kama 65, a.

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“what difference is there whether one completely murders another, or only partially murders him.”

### **Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah**

This Mishnah seems to contradict a story which the Sages tell us in the Talmud<sup>6</sup>. In order to understand this story, we must first give a brief introduction. Rav Zeira was among the third generation of Amora'im. These were the rabbis whose words were compiled in the Gemorah. There were two primary centers of learning for the Amora'im; one in Israel, and the other in Babylonia. That was where the Jews had been exiled after the destruction of the Second Temple. As a young man he lived and studied in Babylonia; he later moved to Israel and studied in the Yeshivos there. The study in Israel was considered to be superior to that in Babylonia because of the holiness of the land. Therefore, the Sages say that the verse in Eichoh – Lamentations<sup>7</sup>, "He has made me dwell in darkness ..." refers to the Babylonian Talmud<sup>8</sup>.

The entire flow of the Babylonian Talmud is as if one is in darkness and must struggle in order to find his way. The Gemorah will make a statement. This will immediately be followed by a question. An attempt will be made to answer the question, which will be followed by a proof that it does not answer the question at all, and so on.

The Jerusalem Talmud has a totally different style. After quoting a Mishnah, a teaching from earlier Sages, more often than not it will make a statement in order to clarify what the Mishnah said, and so on.

Before beginning the study of the Jerusalem Talmud, Rav Zeira fasted for 100 days in order to forget the entire Babylonian Talmud; meaning all of his Talmudic scholarship. He was afraid that the manner and style of his learning would interfere with his learning the Torah of Israel. Based on our Mishnah, how was he permitted to do such a thing? One is prohibited to forget even a single word of his studies. How much more so is this true of forgetting the entire Talmud!

According to the Ramban, the prohibition applies only to forgetting our standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah<sup>9</sup>. Our Mishnah's ruling is not the law. Rather it is, as is the rest of Pirkei Avos, extra piety, Chassidus. It is telling us how to go above the letter of the law. Therefore, forgoing the piety in order to have a better grasp of the Torah of Israel is certainly no problem.

However, a large number of the Halachic codifiers rule that according to the law one is prohibited to forget a single word of Torah. Among those who rule as such is the Alter Rebbe. He writes that<sup>10</sup> “whomever forgets even one word of his studies because he did not review properly is as if he had

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6. Talmud Bava Metzia 85, a.

7. Eichoh 3:6.

8. See Talmud Sanhedrin 24, a.

9. See the Sefer Hamitzvos, Negative Commandment 2.

10. See the Laws of Torah Study Chapter 2, Paragraph 4.

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forfeited his life. Not only that, but he is also transgressing a negative commandment, as the Torah says ‘Just be careful, and verily guard your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen.’“ We must indeed understand how Rav Zeira was permitted to forget *the entire Talmud!*

### **The Explanation**

The reason for the prohibition of forgetting Torah<sup>11</sup> is in order to assure that one does not “separate himself from the Torah.” It is therefore obvious that Rav Zeira was not doing anything wrong; quite to the contrary. Forgetting words of Torah causes one to become separate from Torah. Here, however, his entire intention was obviously in order to be able to absorb to “Torah of Israel” in the best possible way. The Midrash tells us clearly that the “Torah of Israel<sup>12</sup>” is superior.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Terumah and Shabbos Parshas Vayakhel Pekudei, 5740)*

**To dedicate a week, a month or a year of**

**Pirkei Avos of the Week, visit**

**<http://rebbeteachersrashi.org/contact-us-dedicate-an-issue>**

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11. See Sefer Mitzvos Gadol, Negative Commandments 13. The Sefer Mitzvos Kotton makes a similar statement.

12. See Vayikroh Rabbah Section 13, “there is no Torah comparable to that of Israel.”

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF  
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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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

נפטרה ביום ח' שבט, ה'תשע"ח

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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## נדפס ע"י בני משפחתה שיחיו

\* \* \*

## לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

\* \* \*

## נתרם ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מאריס

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן