

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek VI

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 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 lust for honor. More than you study, do. Do not desire the table of kings; for 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 Explanation¹

“Do not seek greatness for yourself,” meaning that one must not chase after positions of leadership. “Do not lust for honor,” do not lust to receive honor for your Torah study. It would then appear as if you are studying Torah for an ulterior motive. Perform acts of kindness and Mitzvos above and beyond what you have learned. This is in keeping with what we have learned earlier², that “one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures.” “Do not desire the table of kings.” One who learns Torah should not wish to have all of his needs provided for him, as is the case with royalty. “Your Employer is faithful to pay you for the rewards of your work.” Even without seeking honor, it will ultimately come.³

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We need to understand why one who is occupied in acquiring Torah would desire “the table of kings?” Torah study involves bonding one’s self with G-dly Wisdom⁴! Here we are speaking of one who is not merely *studying* Torah but *acquiring* it. The person’s very essence becomes G-dliness! Why would such a person be even remotely interested in a royal table? Yet here we find that he may be interested in it to the

1. This chapter is actually not a part of the Mishnah. Rather it is a chapter of Braisa which was added to Pirkei Avos. It is entitled “Kinyan Torah – The Acquisition of Torah.” It is always read/studied on the Shabbos prior to the festival of Shavuot – the time of the giving of the Torah. It is therefore a very appropriate preparation for that day. Because this chapter is not a part of the Mishnah, it does not have Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura’s commentary. We will therefore base the simple explanation on Rashi’s comments.

2. Pirkei Avos Chapter 3, Mishnah 10.

3. Rashi does not comment on the last part of the Mishnah; this explanation is based on the Tifferes Yisroel.

4. See Tanya Chapter 5 at length.

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extent that he must be exhorted not to “desire the table of kings!”

This proves even more difficult based on the entire teaching. It begins by telling one not to seek greatness for himself. It then goes on to say that he must not lust after honor. Why would one who neither seeks greatness for himself nor lusts honor have interest in a royal table? What need is there to specify this?

Diversely, a bit further on in this teaching the Sages explain *why* one must not desire “the table of kings.” It states that it is because “your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs.” In other words, the Sages are saying that there is nothing wrong with the table of kings; however, it is not worthwhile. It seems to be saying that Torah provides us with something greater.

The Explanation

We are taught here that “more than you study, do.” Doing, “Asiyah – אשיה” in Hebrew, also has the connotation of forcing⁵. In other words, it can be interpreted to mean that one must force oneself to learn above and beyond what he is accustomed to, both quantitatively and qualitatively. One must go beyond learning for the pleasure, the enjoyment which it brings. Learning, understanding Torah is one of the greatest pleasures which life has to offer. Nevertheless, one must exert oneself in Torah study.

The Torah promises us that⁶ “If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, 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.” Rashi explains⁷ that when the Torah says “if you follow My statutes,” it means that you shall toil in Torah study. This means that as a result of toiling in Torah study all of one’s physical needs will be attended to. One actually becomes a king, a ruler over this world. In fact, the Sages specifically characterize our rabbis as royalty⁸.

That is the reason for the warning not to *desire* the table of kings. Granted, Hashem does reward us with the table of kings; that is the reward for our toil. Hence, it is clear that we must use the physical world. We are commanded to refine and sanctify this corporal world. Nevertheless, we are told not to *desire* the worldly royal table⁹.

A Practical Lesson

In order to clarify what we have said, the “table of kings” refers to the service of refining

5. See the Bais Yosef to Tur Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deyah Chapter 248, the section beginning with the words “one who is not.”

6. Vayikroh 26:3-4.

7. Ibid.

8. See Talmud Gittin 62, a.

9. See the beginning of Tanya Chapter 7.

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this world. By serving Hashem with the physical objects of this world, we are elevating the G-dly sparks which are found here. Not only that, but as a result of our service here we too are elevated¹⁰. This being the case, we need to know why we are told *not* to desire the “table of kings.” It is apparently a positive thing!

The explanation is, that “your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs.” Serving G-d through refining this world is indeed a lofty thing. In fact, it is so great, that not only does it elevate the world and transform it into a Divine place; it even uplifts the individual and brings him to greater heights. However, your table is greater than theirs.” The bond with Hashem which we attain through Torah study, particularly through toiling in Torah, is far greater. Through Torah study we become directly connected with Hashem Himself. We have a job to do; as G-d’s soldiers we must work with the world in which we were placed. Nevertheless, we must remember that “your table is greater than theirs,” meaning that we can attain a greater bond through Torah.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, 5722)

To dedicate a week, a month or a year of

Pirkei Avos of the Week, visit

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

10. See Likkutei Torah Parshas Tzav 13, b; Parshas Emor 35, c.

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

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

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Hatomim Avrohom Moshe ben Mina Esther שי' Gordon
For a complete and speedy recovery**

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in
YESHIVAH TORAH OHR שיחיו**

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Mrs. Brocha bas Reb Tzvi Nechemiah Hacoheן ע"ה Cohen
Passed away on 8 Shevat, 5778
May Her 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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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

הת' אברהם משה בן מרת מינה אסתר שי' גארדאן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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נדפס ע"י חבריו התמימים

בישיבה תורה אור

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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' מאריס

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן