

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Chapter III

11 Menachem Av, 5786 – July 25, 2026

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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

Adapted from Sefer Hamaamorim Melukat Volume 5, Page 98

פרק ג', משנה ה': רבי נחוניא בן הקנה אומר: "כל המקבל עליו עול תורה, מעבירין ממנו על מלכות ועל דרך ארץ. וכל הפורק ממנו עול תורה, נותנין עליו על מלכות ועל דרך ארץ".

Chapter 3, Mishnah 5: Rabbi Nechunia the son of Hakanah would say, "One who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah is exempted from the yoke of government duties and the yoke of worldly cares. But one who casts off the yoke of Torah is saddled with the yoke of government duties and the yoke of worldly cares."

The Simple Explanation

The basic explanation of this Mishnah seems to be quite clear. Most of us are saddled with the yoke of worldly, day-to-day cares. The Mishnah offers a solution to this burden. By accepting the yoke of Torah, one is freed from all of these issues.

Just exactly what is the *yoke of Torah* that one must accept upon himself? The Rambam, in his commentary on the Mishnah, defines this phrase. It means *constantly* being involved in Torah study.

The Rambam continues, explaining the reason that the yoke of Torah exempts one from the yoke of worldly matters. The Sages tell us that ¹ "it says, ²And the tablets are the work of Hashem's, and the writing is Hashem's writing, engraved (Hebrew Charus - חרות) on the tablets." Do not read the word 'engraved' (Charus - חרות) but rather 'freedom' (Chairus - חירות). For no one is actually free, unless he occupies himself with Torah study ³." Here we see that only through Torah can one attain true freedom.

1. Pirkei Avos Chapter 6, Mishnah 2.

2. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:16.

3. Please note, that the method of "do not read ..., but rather ..." for deriving lessons from the Torah is used quite often by the Sages. However, there are two fundamental things to keep in mind. Firstly, it is not a word game. One cannot simply choose random words, and replace them with others, regardless of how similar they are. Rather, they are all teachings which the various Sages received from their teachers, who received from their teachers, etc., who received from Moshe, who received from Hashem. Secondly, the second reading does not replace the first, rather both are true.

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The Deeper Explanation

This can be understood from the Alter Rebbe's explanation in Tanya ⁴ of a teaching of the Sages, which seems very difficult to understand. The Talmud declares that ⁵ "Bar Hay-Hay said to Hillel ⁶, 'You shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves G-d and him who has not served Him.' (The two expressions seem to be redundant.) 'The righteous' is the same as 'him who serves Hashem'; 'the wicked' is the same as 'him who has not served Him'! He answered him that 'him that serves Him' and 'him that serves Him not' both refer to such as are perfectly righteous. However, one who reviews his chapter a hundred times is not to be compared with one who reviews it a hundred and one times. Bar Hay-Hay responded to him, 'Because of reviewing one less time, he is called 'him who has not served Hashem'? (How can that be?) — He replied, 'Yes, go and learn from the donkey-drivers market. Renting out his service to go ten parasangs⁷, they charge one zuz⁸, for eleven parasangs they charge two zuz.'"

The charge for donkey-drivers renting out their services of mules, and the number of times that one reviews his Torah lesson seem to have no connection with each other. The Alter Rebbe explains this, that "in those days it was customary to review each lesson one hundred times⁹, as, indeed, illustrated in the above Gemorah, by the example taken from the market, where donkey-drivers used to hire themselves out at a rate of ten parasangs for one zuz, but for eleven parasangs charged two zuz. This was because the extra distance exceeded their customary practice. For the same reason, the 101st time reviewing his lesson, which is beyond the normal practice to which he had been accustomed since childhood, is considered equivalent to all the previous one hundred times together. It is even greater than them in endurance and effort. It therefore entitles him to be called 'one who is serving Hashem.'"

What we are saying is that the amount of Torah study needed to qualify as one who served Hashem is the amount needed to change one's very nature. In fact, the Hebrew word for service is

4. Tanya Chapter 15.

5 Tractate Chagigah 9, b.

6. Malachi 3:18.

7. A unit of measure.

8. A unit of money.

9. The reason for this seemingly large amount of review, was because during the time of the Mishnah, it was prohibited to study the oral law from a text. The need to know everything by heart, necessitated this large amount of review.

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"Oved - עובד." This is the same word used for tanning hides - "Ibud Oros – עיבוד עורות." This is what is meant by "the yoke of Torah": learning Torah in a manner that completely changes one's essence.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach 5740)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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