

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Chapter IV

18 Menachem Av, 5786 – August 20, 2026

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

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

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פרק ד', משנה ח': ... רבי צדוק אומר: ... ואל תעשה עטרה להתגדל בה, ולא קרדום לחתוך בה; וכך היה הלל אומר: ודאשתמש בתגא, חלף. הא למדת, כל הנהנה מדברי תורה, נוטל חייו מן העולם.

Chapter 4, Mishnah 5: ... Rabbi Tzaddok would (often) say, '... Do not make the Torah a crown to make oneself great with or a spade to dig.' So would Hillel say, 'one who makes personal use of the crown of Torah shall perish.' Hence, one who benefits from the Torah's words removes his life from the world.

The Simple Explanation

The Bartenura explains this Mishnah as follows ¹. "Making Torah a crown" refers to learning to be called a great rabbi or to sit in a place of honor. Instead, one must study the Torah out of love for G-d. Honor must not be the motivation for Torah study. Furthermore, do not make Torah "a spade with which to dig." Do not learn Torah to "have a trade." Torah study is not a course one takes to receive a diploma. One should not learn Torah to become a Rosh Yeshivah, a Torah teacher, or a rabbi. The Bartenura cites the Talmud as proof of this prohibition ². The Talmud quotes Moshe's words to the Jewish nation, ³ Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances" The Talmud says that just as Moshe taught us without charge, we must also teach without receiving compensation.

However, he questions this. Why is it permissible for a teacher in a Torah school to receive a salary? He explains that one receives payment for caring for the children. Likewise, why is it permissible to pay a rabbi to render Halachic decisions? The explanation is that he is being paid for his time. He could have used that time to earn a living by performing a trade. He is being paid for income he could otherwise have earned.

The Rambam takes a somewhat different approach ⁴. He explains the strict prohibition on earning a livelihood from the Torah ⁵. Likewise, he complains about those who constantly study Torah and rely upon the community for sustenance. He writes similar things in the Mishnah Torah ⁶.

1. See his commentary to the Mishnah here.

2. Talmud Nedorim 37, a.

3. Devorim 4:14.

4. See his commentary to the Mishnah here.

5. Please note that the Rambam supported himself from the practice of medicine.

6. See the Laws of Torah Study, Chapter 3, Paragraph 10.

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There are later-day codifiers who disagree with the Rambam ⁷. They cite various proofs to demonstrate that one may derive sustenance from Torah.

The Alter Rebbe's Position

The Alter Rebbe decides the law as follows ⁸. One is only cautioned not to make Torah a "spade with which to dig" at the *beginning* of one's studies. One may not commence learning Torah with the intent of using it to "make a living." However, this does not apply to one who began Torah study for proper motives, i.e., the love of G-d. However, if he realizes he cannot support himself later, he may sustain himself through Torah. After all, if he lacks essential things, he cannot continue his studies. The Alter Rebbe's words can be explained in two different ways:

1. One may support oneself through Torah study; otherwise, one will be busy seeking to learn a trade. As a result, he will neglect to learn Torah. In other words, supporting himself from Torah study allows him to study Torah.
2. There is a difference between before the fact and after the fact. One may not begin learning to sustain oneself. However, provided that he started acceptably, there is no problem.

An example of this would be one who began studying as a child. His parents supported him; hence, this was no concern. He has no other option but to support himself with Torah once he grows up. Therefore, he may support himself through his Torah study.

This concept is similar to another law regarding Shabbos ⁹. One is not permitted to embark on a ship immediately before Shabbos since it could lead to the desecration of the Shabbos. However, if he left earlier, when it was permissible ¹⁰, he may continue traveling on Shabbos. So, too, if he began Torah study at an allowable time, there would be no difficulty.

Another Application

This will also help us understand a different Mishnah¹¹. "Rabbi Nehorai says, I would set aside all of the trades in the world and only teach my son Torah." We need to understand how he could say such a thing. The Sages have taught us that ¹² "one is obligated to teach his son a trade!"

Based on the above, we can understand this. When one's son begins learning, he is a child and

7. See the Kessef Mishnah's comments to the Rambam *ibid*. See also the Tashbatz Volume 1, Chapter 147.

8. Shulchan Laws of Torah Study, Chapter 3, Paragraph 10.

9. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, Chapter 248, Paragraph 5.

10. Three days prior to Shabbos.

11. Mishnah Kiddushin Chapter 4, Mishnah 14.

12. Talmud Kiddushin 29, a.

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therefore does not need to support himself. Once he grows up, he can support himself from the Torah he studied.

It is irrelevant that his father knows that he will ultimately need to use the Torah he studied as a child. This is the same as boarding a ship three days before Shabbos and knowing that he will be aboard the vessel on Shabbos does not prevent him from boarding it then.

(Adapted from a talk given on 20 Menachem Av, 5718)

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

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