

בס"ד

# PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Week of

## Chapter I

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Compiled from the works of  
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos**

**Chapter I**

**Sichos Kodesh 5737, Parshas Pinchos**

**Chapter I**

פרק א', משנה ג': אנטִיגנוס איש סוכו קבל משמעון הצדיק. הוא הנה אומר: אל תהיו פִּעֲבָדִים המְשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, אֲלֵא הָיוּ פִּעֲבָדִים המְשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, וְיִהְיֶה מוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם.

**Chapter 1, Mishnah 2:** Antignos of Socho received the tradition from Shimon Hatzaddik. He would say: Do not be as slaves, who serve their master for the sake of reward. Instead, be as slaves who serve their master, not for the sake of reward. And may the fear of Heaven be upon you.

**The Explanation<sup>1</sup>**

The phrase at the end of this Mishnah, "and may the fear of heaven be upon you," is a direct continuation of its beginning. The Mishnah starts by saying that we should not serve Hashem "for the sake of receiving a reward." This means that we must not serve Hashem to receive any benefit whatsoever. This means that our Divine service should be solely out of love for the Creator, and for no other reason whatsoever. Therefore, the Mishnah concludes by teaching us that in addition to the love of G-d, we must also serve Him out of fear.

**Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah**

The Torah explicitly commands us to have fear and awe of Hashem, as it states<sup>2</sup>, "You shall fear Hashem your G-d." Furthermore, the Rambam, whose commentary serves as the basis of our explanation, codifies this as Jewish law<sup>3</sup>.

The lessons of Pirkei Avos teach us how to be Chassidim, i.e., how to go beyond the letter of Torah law<sup>4</sup>. Why is a specific Torah law included in Avos?

**The Rebbe's Explanation**

There are two different levels of fear of Hashem. We call these two levels by the names "יראה תתאה"-Low-Level Fear" and "יראה עילאה"-High-Level Fear<sup>5</sup>." The lower level of fear is, as its name implies, the fear

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1. The explanation of this Mishnah is based on the Rambam. It is taken his comments on this Mishnah in his classic Commentary to the Mishnah.

2. Parshas Vo'eschanan, Devorim 6:13.

3. See Mishnah Torah, The Laws of the Fundamental Principles of Torah, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1.

4. Talmud Bava Kamma, 30, a.

5. See Likkutei Sichos Volume 3, Page 781.

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of not fulfilling G-d's Will. One may be punished (Chas Veshalom) for doing something that Hashem disapproves of. Furthermore, transgressing His Will can cause Hashem to withhold a reward.

This is in stark contrast to the higher level of fear. The term "awe" is a more accurate description of this level of fear. As a result of this emotion, one stands in awe of Hashem's majesty and greatness. This feeling will not allow one to transgress His Will. The very idea of not following G-d's directives fills one with trembling and shame before the greatness of Hashem.

Based on this, we can answer our question. The Torah's commandment to fear Hashem refers to the lower level of fear. This fear of Hashem comes naturally to the Jew by virtue of his G-dly soul. The Sages see this level of fear as a small thing. We understand this from the teaching of the Rabbis<sup>6</sup> based on the verse<sup>7</sup> "And now, Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, demand of you? Only to fear Hashem..." "

This is not the type of fear of Hashem the Mishnah is commanding us to have, which is the higher level of fear of Hashem, awe, and a feeling of how insignificant we are before Hashem.

We began by saying that the teaching "may the fear of heaven be upon you" follows the statement that we should not serve Hashem for the sake of receiving a reward, meaning that we should serve Hashem without expecting a reward. In other words, the Mishnah is telling us to serve Hashem out of love, as we said earlier in the explanation.

Serving Hashem through love is quite a lofty level. The way to attain this is by first serving Hashem through the lower-level fear. Fear of punishment or the possibility of not receiving a reward prompts one to learn the Torah and fulfill Mitzvos. This service of Hashem is not ideal but is most acceptable. The Sages tell us that<sup>8</sup> "a person should always be busy with Torah study, whether for G-d's sake or even if not for His sake, for from (studying Torah which) is not for Hashem's sake will come (Torah study which) is for G-d's sake. This G-dly service, as a result of fear of Divine retribution, brings the love of Hashem. With this, we can acquire a higher sort of fear. That is why this is a part of Pirkei Avos. It is a way to attain true piety, above the demands of the letter of the law.

This can also help us answer a different question. Further on, the Mishnah says that<sup>9</sup>, " Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah would say, ...If there is no wisdom, there is no fear of G-d; if there is no fear of G-d, there is no wisdom..." The obvious question is, where does one begin? He cannot start with wisdom

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6. Talmud Berochos, 32, b. See also Tanya, the beginning of Chapter 42.

7. Parshas Aikev, Devorim 10:12.

8. Talmud Pesachim 50, b, Taanis 7, a, Berochos 17, a, and Nedorim 62, a. See also Rambam Laws of Torah Study Chapter 3, Paragraph 5.

9. Pirkei Avos, Chapter 3, Mishnah 17.

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because he can have no wisdom without fear of Hashem. He cannot start with the fear of Hashem because there is no fear of Hashem without wisdom!

Based on the above, we can understand this. There are two different sorts of fear of G-d: the lower and the higher. One needs to begin serving Hashem with a lower level of fear. From there, one can attain true wisdom. Once a person gains wisdom, they will be able to attain a higher level of fear.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Pinchos, 5737)*

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

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