

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Chapter Three

10 Iyar, 5784 – May 18, 2024

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 7, Pages 365-367

Toras Menachem Hisvadu'yos 5744 Volume 4, Page 2324-2325

Chapter III, Mishnah 15

פרק ג', משנה ט"ו: הכל צפוי, והרשות נתונה, ובטוב העולם נדון, והכל לפי רוב המעשה.

Chapter 3, Mishnah 15: All is foreseen, and freedom of choice is granted. The world is judged with goodness but in accordance with the amount of man's positive deeds.

The Simple Explanation

The Bartenura explains the meaning of "the world is judged with goodness" and that Hashem judges the world through His attribute of mercy. However, this Divine mercy does not apply to all of us equally. G-dly mercy applies to each one "according to the amount of Man's positive deeds."

In addition to this explanation, both the Bartenura and the Midrash Shmuel quote the Rambam's comments on this Mishnah. In his Commentary to the Mishnah, the Rambam explains that "all is foreseen," meaning that whatever each person has done and all that he will do is known by Hashem. One might think this is the case, and there is no such thing as free choice¹. Since Hashem knows everything everyone will do, we are *forced* to be either a Tzaddik or a Rasha. That is why the Mishnah continues by saying that "freedom of choice (literally 'permission') is granted." Hashem's knowledge does not force one to behave in a particular manner.

Why does the Mishnah say that the world is judged "in accordance with the *quantity*, the amount of man's positive deeds?" It seems that it would have been more appropriate for the Mishnah to have said that the judgment is made according to the *quality* of man's deeds. Quality is much more important than quantity, meaning the number of times one performs a deed.

The Rambam explains this as follows. He says that there are times when quantity has an advantage over quality, for example, regarding the Mitzvah of Tzedokoh². It is greater to give one

1. We know that there is free choice from the verse "Behold, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil," (Parshas Nitzovim, Devorim 30:16).

2. There is actually a far simpler allegory. It is necessary for ten men above the age of Bar Mitzvah to join together in order to have a Minyan, a quorum required for the recitation of various prayers. It does not help to have nine men, even if they are all of the stature (quality) of Moshe Rabbeinu.

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dollar to a poor individual one hundred times than to give the same person a hundred dollars at once. By extending the Tzedokoh over many times, one refines himself one hundred-fold. He becomes accustomed to giving Tzedokoh to the point that he acquires this all-important trait as his own.

The Alter Rebbe explains why giving smaller amounts of Tzedokoh over a more extended period is greater than giving one large amount³. "Whoever is enlightened as to so great and wondrous a matter will discover and appreciate how profound are the words of the Sages, of blessed memory, when they said, 'Everything is judged according to the number of positive deeds.' This refers to the act of charity which is performed numerous times, which draws down the ultimate form of life; this is also similar to what the Rambam wrote in praise of the repeated giving of *Tzedokoh*, '(that it serves to) refine the soul.'"

When performed over time, the repetition of these actions draws down the ultimate form of Divine life. It enables us to constantly bask in His presence, receiving life directly from Hashem.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

We need to understand how it is possible to reconcile freedom of choice with Hashem, who already knows whatever choice one will ultimately make. If the choice one will ultimately make is a given before he even decides what he will do, how can we say that he was free to do whatever he chose? It would seem to be cause and effect; Hashem's knowledge caused him to behave in a certain way.

The Explanation

To understand this, we must first realize that Hashem is not bound by any physical limitations, including those of time or space. Past, present, and future are all one for Him. This being the case, we can understand that Hashem's knowledge of the choice an individual *will* make, whether positive or not, is not the *cause* of his actions; instead, it is the effect of his actions. From Hashem's perspective, there is no difference between the past and the future. Hence, the actions the person will perform (in the future) caused Hashem's knowledge (in the past). We initially assumed (based on our limitations) that Hashem's knowledge caused the individual's actions. The truth is that it works the other way around. Hashem's knowledge is the *result* of the person's choice. Although from our perspective, G-d's knowledge came first, nevertheless, from Hashem's

3. See Igeres Hakodesh, Chapter 21.

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perspective, time is not a factor.

(Adapted from a letter written on 22 Teves, 5709 and the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Devorim,

5744)

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

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