

בס"ד

# PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

## Perek II

6 Iyar, 5779 – May 11, 2019

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 II

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### Chapter II

**פרק ב', משנה ט"ו:** רבי טרפון אומר: היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה, והפועלים עצלים, והשכר הרבה, ובעל הבית דוחק.  
**Chapter 2, Mishnah 15:** Rabbi Tarfon would say, "The day is short, there is much work, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the Master is pressing.

### The Simple Explanation

According to the commentary of the Bartenura, Rabbi Tarfon is teaching us the following<sup>1</sup>. **The day is short:** our life in this world is short; one has a limited amount of time in which to accomplish his mission in life. **There is much work:** The Torah's "measure is longer than the earth, and wider than the sea<sup>2</sup>." **And the Master is pressing:** As it is written<sup>3</sup>, "... you shall meditate therein day and night ..."

### Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

There is a well-known rule, that Hashem only demands of us that of which we are able to do<sup>4</sup>. In other words, He does not command us to do anything which He does not enable us to fulfill. However, from our Mishnah it seems as if that is not the case at all. There is so very much to do, and the time allotted for it is never enough. Granted, if one succeeds in fulfilling his mission, he will be handsomely rewarded; however, with so very much to accomplish, and so little time in which to do it, it seems unlikely! Furthermore, "the Master is pressing," our Employer is always rushing us, pushing us to complete our "assignments." Aside from everything else; we appear to have the trait of laziness; it seems that by our very nature we lack what it takes to get the job done!

### The Explanation

This can be explained in the following manner. All of the teachings in Avos, focus on the same idea. They all teach us how to be a Chossid, i.e. one who goes beyond the letter of the law<sup>5</sup>. Naturally, we understand that the same is true of our Mishnah.

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1. See his comments to our Mishnah.
  2. Iyov 11:9.
  3. Yehoshua 1:8.
  4. See the Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 12, 3.
  5. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

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There are those who conduct themselves strictly according to the requirements of Halachah, Jewish law. This is fine; they are fulfilling that which is demanded of them. Their behavior is totally acceptable. However, one who contemplates the reason for which he was created, will never be satisfied with this sort of conduct. One's Neshomah, soul, rests in Gan Eden; a spiritual, Divine world, basking in G-dly light. From there it descends into a physical body in this dark, material world. Why must the soul lower itself to this extent? The reason is, because it is only as a result of this descent that it can reach an even higher level than it held earlier<sup>6</sup>. This realization will not allow one to be satisfied with simply meeting the minimum requirements and no more. He will always seek to do more and more to please his Master. This will bring him to the conclusion that "the day is short and there is much work."

This is in line with the Alter Rebbe's explanation of the Sage's comments to verse<sup>7</sup> "you shall return and see (the difference) between the righteous and the wicked; between one who serves Hashem and him who has not served Him." The Gemorah explains that<sup>8</sup> "One who serves G-d' refers to he who reviews his lesson 101 times, while "one who has not served Him' refers to one who reviews his lesson no more than 100 times." Why do the Rabbis find such a vast difference between 101 in contrast to 100 times?

The Alter Rebbe explains that<sup>9</sup> "this is because in those days it was customary (for everyone) to review each lesson one hundred times<sup>10</sup> ... the 101<sup>st</sup> time, which is beyond the normal practice to which the student was accustomed since childhood, is considered equivalent to all the previous times put together. It is even greater than them in endurance and effort; it therefore entitles him to be called "one who serves Hashem." For in order to change his nature, he must awaken the love of G-d by means of meditation in his mind on the greatness of G-d, in order to control his nature."

This is the meaning of our Mishnah. Even if one serves Hashem, and conducts himself thoroughly according to Torah, he may still be in the category of "one who has not served Him," in contrast to one who goes beyond his nature. One who feels that "the day is short, there is much work and the Master is pressing," has certainly reached the level of "one who is serving Hashem."

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6. See Tanya Chapter 37.

7. Malachi 3:18.

8. See Talmud Chagigah 9, b.

9. See Tanya Chapter 15.

10. The Talmud was not permitted to be written down; it had to be studied by memory.

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Otherwise, he may just be following his own natural tendencies. This is why the Mishnah says that “the workers are lazy.” This “laziness” is in relation to the energy required to serve Hashem beyond one’s nature. For one who does perform his service beyond the letter of the law, beyond his nature, the reward indeed is great.

We said above, that Hashem only demands of us that which we are capable of doing. The fact that at this time, according to Torah we study Pirkei Avos, means that Hashem gives us extra abilities, helping us go beyond our nature in His service. Hashem rewards us measure for measure. May we merit being lifted above the boundaries and limitations of exile as a result of going beyond our personal limitations.

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Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

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