

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek II

6 Iyar, 5782 – May 7, 2022

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
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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 א': רבי אומר:

איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם? כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם.

והוי זהיר במצווה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצווה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עבירה כנגד הפסדה.

הסתכל בשלושה דברים ואין אתה בא לידי עבירה: דע מה למעלה ממך – עין רואה, ואוזן שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין.

Chapter 2, Mishnah 1: Rebbe would say:

- 1.) Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it and harmonious for mankind.
- 2.) Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the mitzvos. Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards and the rewards of a transgression against its cost.
- 3.) Consider three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know what is above you. A seeing eye, a listening ear, and all of your deeds are inscribed in a book.

The Simple Explanation

This Mishnah contains a teaching which Rebbe often said. Whenever the Talmud writes "Rebbe" without specifying which rabbi, it refers to Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi¹. This is out of deference to him. He was the one who edited and compiled all of the teachings of the Sages. This compilation formed the Mishnah, which is the foundation and the basis of the Oral Law.

His teaching consists of three different (though related) sections. The Rambam explains the second section of this Mishnah as follows². "Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the Mitzvos." The Torah does not tell us the reward one receives for fulfilling the positive commandments³. This seeming "omission" is intentional (as is the case with everything in the Torah). It assures that we observe each Mitzvah equally; the Torah does not tell us which has a greater or lesser reward.

Rebbe continues his teaching by telling us to "consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards" The Rambam explains that even though the Torah does not specify a reward for Mitzvos, we can understand

1. He was also referred to by the appellation Rabbeinu Hakadosh – Our Holy Rabbi.

2. See his Commentary to the Mishnah here.

3. This is unlike the Torah's prohibitions; the punishment for transgressing each prohibition is clearly stated.

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which Mitzvah has a greater reward. We must consider the severity of the punishment for a transgression ("the cost of a mitzvah"). Desecrating the Shabbos is a capital offense⁴, and neglecting the performance of circumcision is punishable by Koreis – Excision, which is less severe than a death penalty. In this manner, we can understand that the reward for keeping the Shabbos is more significant than that given for circumcision.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

Based on the Rambam's explanation, it is challenging to understand Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi's teaching. Firstly, he tells us how important it is for us to fulfill each Mitzvah with the same enthusiasm. To accomplish this, the Torah refrains from telling us the reward for keeping positive commandments. He then teaches us what would appear to be a "workaround." If you would like to know the relative greatness of one Mitzvah's reward compared to another, look at the severity of its punishment. What does the Torah accomplish by withholding this information? It is readily available to us in any case.

The Answer

There are two types of rewards for the fulfillment of Mitzvos:

1. There is a particular reward for each Mitzvah. In terms of this reward, each Mitzvah is distinct from all other Mitzvos. In this regard, there is a difference between *minor* and *major* Mitzvos. We can calculate how great this type of reward is from the severity of the punishment for neglecting it.
2. There is another type of reward for the fulfillment of each Mitzvah. This reward is equal for all of the 248 positive commandments.

The Alter Rebbe explains⁵ the Mishnah⁶, "The reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah," in the following manner. From the reward of a Mitzvah, it is possible to know its essence. This means there is a parallelism between the reward of a Mitzvah and its nature.

Just as we explained that there are two types of rewards; likewise, there are two distinct characteristics of Mitzvos.

1. The performance of a Mitzvah *refines* the one who fulfills it⁷. Not only that, but this performance also refines the objects with which they are performed⁸. In this regard, there is a difference between every Mitzvah, and each Mitzvah's refinement is different.

4. Please note that a death penalty only applies to one who is aware of the severity of his actions. Furthermore, two witnesses must see him as he is about to perform this desecration. Moreover, they must warn him of the consequences for his actions within a short time prior to their commission.

5. See Tanya Chapter 39.

6. See further, Chapter 4, Mishnah 2.

7. See the Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis 44, a, "The Mitzvos were given to us in order to refine people."

8. See Likkutei Torah Parshas Bechukosai 45, c.

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2. By the performance of each Mitzvah, one is fulfilling Hashem's Will, which is the common denominator between all of the Mitzvos.

Based on this, we can understand the Mishnah's teaching. The difference between the reward for one Divine commandment and another only considers the amount and type of refinement that it brings about in the world. Each Mitzvah accomplishes different things within the world. Regarding this, Rabbi Yehudah said to "consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards."

Contrast this with the reward for fulfilling G-d Almighty's Will. This is a far greater reward; for this sort of reward. There is no difference whatsoever between one Mitzvah and another. Regarding this type of reward, Rebbe said that "you do not know the rewards of the Mitzvos." We must therefore apply ourselves equally to all Mitzvos without distinction.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bereishis, 5720)

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

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

**Dr. Mindel Rivka (Muriel) bas Reb Menachem Mendel Shlomo ע"ה
Stitt**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיחיו

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"

Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו

Morris

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו**

Morris

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther' שתחי Sharabani

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) שי' Bentov

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

* * *

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סתית

נפטרה ש"ק פרשת לך לך, יו"ד מר-חשון תשפ"ב

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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