

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Concluding Mishnah of Pirkei Avos

9 Menachem Av, 5779 – July 28, 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
Concluding Mishnah of Pirkei Avos**
Likkutei Sichos Volume 17, Page 416 - 418

Important Note

This Shabbos is Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Menachem Av. Tisha B'Av is the national day of mourning and fasting for Jews. However, on Shabbos one may neither fast nor display public signs of mourning, hence this year the fast is pushed off until Sunday. However, there are certain private signs of mourning which must be observed on Shabbos. Since words of Torah make one happy¹, one may not study Torah on the ninth day of Menachem Av² after Halachic midday³. For the exact halachic time of midday in your location, click:

https://www.chabad.org/calendar/zmanim_cdo/aid/143790/jewish/Zmanim-Halachic-Times.htm.

That said, this week we do not study the regular chapter of Pirkei Avos. Therefore, we will not continue with Chapter III until next Shabbos. This week's "Pirkei Avos of the Week" will offer an explanation of the Mishnah which we read following to each week's chapter. Next week, with Hashem's help, we will continue with an explanation from the Rebbe of a Mishnah in Chapter III.

Concluding Mishnah of Pirkei Avos

מכות פרק ג', משנה ט"ז: רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר: רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות, שנאמר: ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר.

Makkos Chapter 10, Mishnah 16: Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to make the Jews meritorious; therefore He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in an abundant measure, as it is written⁴: 'Hashem desired, for the sake of his righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious.'"

The Simple Explanation

This Mishnah is customarily learned at the conclusion of reciting/learning each chapter of Pirkei Avos. The Bartenura explains that this teaching does not actually belong in Avos; rather it is a Mishnah in Tractate Makkos. However, because this Mishnah has a pleasant ending, namely "to make the Torah

1. Tehillim 19:9.

2. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, Laws of Tisha B'Av, Chapter 554. There are exceptions to this ruling; laws directly related to Tisha B'Av, and sorrowful sections of the Torah, such as Iyov.

3. In Jewish law, midday does not refer to noon. Rather it is halfway between sunrise and sunset.

4. Yeshayahu 42:21.

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great and glorious,” it became customary to conclude each chapter with these words. As is the case with everything in Torah, we try to conclude with something pleasant.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

This Mishnah must obviously have an additional connection to Pirkei Avos. The entire reason for ending each and every chapter with this Mishnah cannot simply be in order to conclude with something happy. There must be thousands of Mishnayos with happy endings⁵; why was this specific Mishnah chosen?

The Explanation

This can be understood based on the Bartenura’s explanation at the beginning of Avos⁶. He writes that “This tractate does not explain Mitzvos of the Torah, as is the case with other tractates. ... Rather this entire work consists of ethical teachings. The fact is, that the sages of the nations of the world also composed ethical works, teaching man how to live properly. They based these works on their own intelligence ... Pirkei Avos comes to teach us that *our* ethics, the ethical character traits practiced by the Jewish people, is not the result of human understanding. It was given to Moshe by G-d at Mount Sinai, together with the rest of the Torah.”

This requires additional explanation. Based on the above, we see that it is possible to be an upright, ethical person without Torah. Why was it necessary for Hashem to command us to behave ethically at Sinai, thereby making it a part of Torah?

The answer to this question is found in the Mishnah we are discussing. “The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to make the Jews meritorious; therefore, He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in an abundant measure ...” This is not merely referring to the quantity of Mitzvos. It does not mean, that in order to make sure that we have an abundant number of Torah and Mitzvos, Hashem added ethical teachings to the mix. Rather, we are discussing the quality of Mitzvos. There is a difference between the very essence of an ethical Torah character, and an ethical character based on human understanding.

The intent of the ethics which are taught by the nations, is to improve the relationship between man and his fellow. Contrast that with the moral teachings which we receive from our Sages. Torah ethics and morality can serve to refine oneself. The Hebrew word for “meritorious,” Lezakos - לזכות, is much

5. There are 4,192 Mishnayos in the Talmud. You may find variations to this number; different editions of the Talmud are divided differently.

6. See his commentary to Avos Chapter 1, Mishnah 1.

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deeper than merely serving as a merit. The word זכות, merit, is related to the word זיכוך, which means purifying or refining.

That is the connection between our Mishnah and the book of Avos. Following the ethical teachings of Avos not only elevates our behavior and our relations with others. It refines us, purifies us, and adds an extra dimension of holiness to us. This is only possible because these teachings are a G-d given part of the Torah.

(Adapted from the Sichah of Acharei-Kedoshim, 5746)

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Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HIS FAMILY שיקיו

מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

* * *

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חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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