

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek III

13 Iyar, 5779 – May 18, 2019

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
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Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos
Chapter III**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 34, Pages 24 - 31

Chapter III

פרק ג', משנה ח': רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי משום רבי מאיר אומר: כל השוכח דבר אחד ממשנתו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו, שנאמר (דברים ד), רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ...

Chapter 3, Mishnah 18: Rabbi Dusta'i the son of Rabbi Yannai would say in the name of Rabbi Meir, "Anyone who forgets even a single word of his learning, the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life. As is stated¹, 'Just be careful, and guard your soul, in order that you do not forget that which your eyes have seen'" ...

The Simple Explanation

The reason for the serious consequences of forgetting Torah, is because it is² "our life and the length of our days." Therefore, one who forgets what he learned is casting aside a part of his very life!

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura offers two explanations of this Mishnah³. The first seems to apply primarily to a rabbi. As a result of his forgetfulness, he may permit that which is prohibited. This could thereby cause others to transgress words of Torah. His second explanation is, that the Torah which one learned can protect him. As a result of forgetting what he studied, he will lose this protection. Therefore, "the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life."

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Talmud tells us that Rav Zeira lived and studied Torah in Bavel (Babylonia). When he "ascended" to the Land of Israel⁴, he fasted 100 fasts in order to forget the Babylonian Talmud⁵.

1. Parshas Vo'eschanan, Devorim 4:9.
2. These words are from the blessing "Ahavas Olam" which precedes the recital of Shema. Torah is comparable to water, which is the source of a fish's life (see Talmud Berochos 61, b).
3. See his commentary to this Mishnah.
4. "Ascending" to Israel means that he moved there. The Talmud tells us (Kiddushin 69, b) that Israel is the highest of all lands.
5. See the Talmud Bava Metzia 85, a.
6. The point of fasting in order to forget his learning, was part of his request for Divine mercy to help him do so. It is obvious that fasting in and of itself does not cause forgetfulness.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

This was in order to make sure that it would not hinder his study of the Jerusalem Talmud⁷.

We see from our Mishnah how serious it is to forget even a single word of Torah. How was Rav Zeira allowed to *intentionally* cause himself to forget the *entire Talmud Bavli*?

The Explanation

The Talmud tells us that⁸ the Torah contains 613 commandments; included in these are 248 positive commandments (do's) and 365 negative commandments (do not's). What the Sages do not tell us, is which commandments are included in the 613. Hence, it is a matter of discussion among the medieval rabbis who were occupied in counting the Mitzvos, and codifying Jewish law.

As stated in the Mishnah itself, the source of the prohibition against forgetting a teaching of Torah is the verse⁹, "Just be careful, and guard your soul, in order that you do not forget that which your eyes have seen." There is discussion whether this verse actually prohibits forgetting words of Torah. According to the Ramban (Nachmanides), it does not. Rather, this verse prohibits forgetting the scene of Jewish Nation standing at Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah. However, he says that the parameters of this verse can be extended to also include not forgetting individual teachings of Torah. However, this is not an actual prohibition, rather it is a matter of extra piety. It involves going beyond what the Torah requires.

What this means to us, is that according to the Ramban we have no question. Rav Zeira wished to forget the Talmud Bavli in order to attain an even higher level of study than he had reached earlier. Hence, he was under no obligation to be "pious," in such a way that would prevent him from reaching an even greater level of study.

However, among the rabbis there are those who disagree with the Ramban. Among them are the Sefer Mitzvos Gadol¹⁰ and the Sefer Mitzvos Katan¹¹. In fact, the Alter Rebbe writes that the accepted law is that¹² "whoever forgets even one part of his learning because he did not review it properly, is considered as if he had forfeited his life, and has transgressed a negative commandment, as it says, 'Just be careful, and guard your soul ...'" According to this opinion, it is certainly difficult to understand how Rav Zeira was permitted to make an effort to forget such a large and fundamental section of Torah.

7. The style of learning in the Jerusalem Talmud, and in Israel in general, was significantly different than that of Bavel.

8. Makkos 23, b.

9. See footnote 1.

10. See Negative Commandment 13.

11. See Chapter 15.

12. See his Laws of Torah Study, Chapter 2, Paragraph 4.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

The reason for the prohibition against forgetting words of Torah, is that as a result of this, one is separating himself from Torah¹³. This is true whether he actively makes an effort to forget, or he passively forgets as a result of not reviewing his studies. In either case, the words of Torah are separated from him.

Based on this, it is clear that Rav Zeira's actions were perfectly in keeping with Torah. He was not removing himself from Torah; to the contrary. He acted in order to be able to better absorb the Torah of the Land of Israel, which is greater than Torah which was studied in Babylonia¹⁴. He was not removing himself from Torah, or Torah from himself. Rather he attained a far greater level of Torah.

As a result of our Torah study, and our constant review of what we learn, may we merit the coming of Moshiach now!

*(Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Terumah and Shabbos Parshas Vayakhel
Pekudei, 5740)*

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13. These are the words of the Sefer Mitzvos Gadol, *ibid*.

14. This is as the Midrash states (Vayikroh Rabbah, Chapter 13), “there is no Torah like that of Israel.

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Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

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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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נפטר ש"ק פ' בשלח, י"ג שבט, ה'תשע"ט

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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