

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek VI

7 Elul, 5779 – September 7, 2019

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 VI**

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Chapter VI

פרק ו', משנה א': שנו חכמים בלשון המשנה, ברוך שבהר בהם ובמשנתם. רבי מאיר אומר: כל העוסק בתורה לשמה, זוכה לדברים הרבה ...

Chapter 6, Mishnah¹ 1: The Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah, blessed is He who chose them and their learning. Rabbi Mayer would (often) say, “Whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits many things ... “

The Simple Explanation

This week we learn the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos. It begins with the words “the Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah.” This tells us that the chapter itself is not Mishnah, rather it is a collection of teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah which is written in the same language.

The Mishnayos of Pirkei Avos consist of five chapters. This sixth chapter was added later. It is called by the name “Kinyan Torah – the Acquisition of Torah.” The reason for this is because the entire chapter discusses the importance and greatness of Torah study; and what one can do to acquire this great attribute. Some say that it was added because of the custom to learn/recite one chapter of Avos each week between the festival of Pesach and Shavuos. There are six weeks, hence we need to have six chapters. It is especially important to learn *this* chapter which teaches us how to acquire the Torah on the Shabbos immediately preceding Shavuos; when we celebrate the giving of the Torah^{2 3}.

Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi edited the Mishnah and decided what to include. The teachings in this chapter are called Beraysos, which is derived from the Aramaic term “Bar,” meaning outside. They are “outside of the

1. I am using the term “Mishnah – משנה” in both the Hebrew and the English in order to maintain consistency with the earlier chapters. As we shall see in the explanation, it is not an actual Mishnah. Rather this chapter is divided into teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah, which were not included in the Mishnah’s canon.

2. See the commentary of the Midrash Shmuel to this Beraysos.

3. There are actually two customs regarding when Pirkei Avos is to be learned. The Alter Rebbe writes in his Siddur (before Pirkei Avos which follows the Shabbos afternoon service) as follows. “It is customary to recite one chapter of Pirkei Avos each Shabbos between Pesach and Shavuos at the afternoon service ... There are those who follow this custom each Shabbos of the summer.” According to the first custom, we can understand the reason for adding this particular chapter on the sixth (and final) week. It immediately precedes the giving of the Torah. However, according to the second custom why read chapter six on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah? It may be possible to explain that Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the “Ten Days of Teshuvah.” These days come to a conclusion on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is also the time of receiving the Torah, inasmuch as we then received the second set of tablets.

I have written this as a footnote rather than including it in the text because the Rebbe did not include it in this talk. However, the Sages teach us that Yom Kippur is the day on which we received the second tablets. See also the Rebbe’s discourse Lehovin Inyan Simchas Torah 5742.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

scope of the Mishnah.” However, they are written in the same language as the Mishnah⁴. This includes both the language itself and the style in which they are written. The Mishnah and the Beraysos are both written in Hebrew. This is in contrast to the Gemorah which explains the Mishnah, and often quotes Beraysos, which is written in Aramaic. Additionally, the style of the Mishnah and the Beraysos are similar; they are both written in very terse and concise language. Furthermore, the teachings in this chapter are actually fit to be called Mishnah; they are equal in stature to the Mishnayos⁵.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The fact that Beraysos are written in the same language and linguistic style as the Mishnayos is not only true of this chapter. It is true throughout the Talmud. The entire Talmud is interspersed with Beraysos. Yet we find no other place where the Sages declare the greatness of a Beraysoh. Of all sixty-three tractates of the Talmud, why did the Sages choose Pirkei Avos alone to let us know the great stature of a Beraysoh? It is here alone that the Mishnah tells us, as the Midrash Shmuel explains, that “they (the Beraysos) are of equal stature to the Mishnayos.”

The Explanation

The answer to this is found within the question itself. As mentioned above, the word Beraysoh is derived from the Aramaic word “outside.” On a deeper level, the word “outside” conveys something very positive. We are taking the teachings of the Sages of the Mishnah and transporting them to somewhere *seemingly* outside the realm of Torah.

This is actually a fundamental part of the idea of Torah. On the one hand Torah is⁶ a “secret treasure, which has been hidden by You ... before the world was created.” However, the Torah also⁷ “descended from its place of glory ... and progressively descended through hidden stages, stage after stage, with the descent of the worlds, until it clothed itself in physical objects and this-worldly things.” Despite this tremendous descent, it retains its essence. Even in this corporal, physical world, it remains Hashem’s Will and Wisdom. There it has the power to elevate and refine this world; it can be used to transform this world into⁸ “a dwelling place for Hashem below.”

We see this idea of the Torah “progressively descending through stages” in the very beginning of Pirkei Avos. It begins by telling us that⁹ “Moshe received the Torah from (Hashem at Mount) Sinai and gave it over to Yehoshua. Yehoshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the

4. See the commentary of the Bartenura to this Beraysoh.

5. See the commentary of the Midrash Shmuel to this Beraysoh.

6. See Talmud Shabbos 88, b.

7. See Tanya Chapter 4.

8. Midrash Tanchumah Parshas Naso, 16, among other sources.

9. See Pirkei Avos Chapter 1, Mishnah 1.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Men of the Great Assembly.” The commentaries explain¹⁰ that the Mishnah is telling us the first stages of the Torah’s transmission. From that point it has continually been given over from teacher to student, until our present day.

This chain alludes to the descent of the Torah throughout all of the generations of history. Due to the descent of the stature of the generations, it is incumbent upon us to become increasingly scrupulous regarding Torah and Mitzvos. The further removed the generations are from the giving of the Torah, that much more care is needed in order to preserve its integrity. Therefore, the first Mishnah concludes by telling us¹¹ to “make a fence around the Torah,” Ceaseless vigilance is needed to assure that we maintain our connection to Torah. Hence, Sages of ensuing generations enacted laws, “fences,” to assure the preservation of the Torah. The fact is that these “fences” have the same power as the Torah itself which “Moshe received from Mount Sinai¹².”

This same idea which is hinted at in the beginning of Pirkei Avos, is also alluded to at its conclusion. These Beraysos, despite the fact that they are *outside* the corpus of the Mishnah, were “taught by the Sages in the language of the Mishnah.” This is in order to demonstrate that they are the equivalent of the Mishnah. They have the same force as the rest of the Torah which “Moshe received from Mount Sinai.”

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Mevorchim Hachodesh and Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 5749)

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10. See Midrash Shmuel at the beginning of Pirkei Avos.

11. See footnote 9.

12. See Rambam Laws of Mamrim (Rebellious Ones) Chapter 1, Paragraph 2 and Chapter 2, Paragraph 2.

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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheh ש' **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HIS DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW

Rabbi **Shmuel** and **Rifka** שיקזיו **Mendelsohn**

**מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש**

* * *

לזכות

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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