



Likkutei Sichos

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Hashem Likes Exertion

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* And the completion, *siyum*, of **tractate Avos**.

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1.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS MISHNAH?

“Ben Hei-Hei would say: The reward is commensurate with the pain.”¹ *Bartenura* explains: “The more strain you endure in the study of Torah and performance of mitzvos, the greater your reward will be.”

Being rewarded for mitzvos is mandated by **halachah** [as evident by Rambam’s codification of this principle in his (halachic) work, the *Yad*.² What’s more, Rambam elaborates and explains a number of legal specifics].³ This means that according to Torah law, Hashem is “obligated,” as it were, to reward a person for his service, just as an employer is obligated to remunerate an employee for his labor.

The novelty of the maxim, “The reward is commensurate with the pain,” (presumably) is that the reward is determined by the measure of pain, not the work, benefit, or improvement {provided by the worker}. On this basis — when a person’s *avodah*⁴ delivers minimal benefit, to the point that “the expenditure, pain and discomfort exceed the value of the improvement”⁵ (his toil and pain, etc., are greater than the outcome and achievement), his reward is not calculated by the value of the improvement but by the value of his toil and pain.

We need to clarify:

From the outset, the reward for mitzvos is proportional to the expenditure, discomfort, labor, and pain that mitzvos demand. As our Sages expounded numerous times: “*If you walk in my statutes* — you should **toil** in Torah study...⁶ I will grant you rain”; “*A person who serves... one who does not*

¹ *Avos*, end of ch. 5.

² “This work (is {composed of a compilation of distinct}) *halachos, halachos*” (Rambam’s Introduction to *Sefer HaYad* {also known as *Mishneh Torah*}).

³ See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 3, par. 1-5; ch. 8 and 9; end of “*Hilchos Melachim*.”

⁴ {Divine service.}

⁵ *Midrash Shmuel*, end of tractate *Avos* (in the explanation of the dictum: “The reward is commensurate with the pain”).

⁶ *Toras Kohanim* (cited by Rashi), beg. of *parshas Bechukosai*.

serve — someone who reviews his studies one hundred times is incomparable to one who reviews his studies one hundred and one times... for **two zuz**⁷ (since he deviates from his routine);⁸ “*When a **soul** offers*⁹ — who is accustomed to bringing a *minchah* offering? A pauper. I will consider it as if he had offered his very soul.”¹⁰ **And many others.**

The same holds true for an employer and employee: The law (found in Talmud and halachic authorities)¹¹ that we pay an employee only for the improvement when the expenditures “exceed the improvement” is limited to specific cases: When the employer did not hire the employee, but instead the employee acted voluntarily (for example, “a person who enters his friend’s field and plants in it **without** permission”),¹² or when the employee acted **against** the employer’s instructions (“{Paint this} red, and he painted it black, {paint this} black and he painted it red”),¹³ or when the employee caused damage deliberately (“he painted the item hideously”).¹⁴

However, when the employee did the work as instructed, then, even in a case where the expenditure exceeds the improvement's value, and even when nothing **at all** was accomplished — his work did not bring about the benefit that it was supposed to, as in the case where “one hires a worker to bring cabbage and plums to someone ill and he goes and discovers that the person has since passed, etc.”¹⁵ — since “the agent executed his mission,” he did everything incumbent upon him perfectly (and due to extenuating circumstances, the purpose and intent of the job was not achieved), the rule is that “he must be paid the **full**

⁷ *Chagigah* 9b; see further in this *sichah*, Section 6.

⁸ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 15; see *Sotah* (11b), that giving women’s work to men constitutes **oppressive** work.

⁹ *Vayikra* 2:1.

¹⁰ *Menachos* 104b; cited by Rashi on the verse.

¹¹ And since, “He tells **His words** to Yaakov, **His statutes and His laws** to Yisrael; ‘what He does He tells Yisrael to do’” (*Shemos Rabbah* 30:9; see *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Rosh Hashanah* 1:3), it is clear that the laws of an employer paying an employee are similar to the reward paid by Hashem.

¹² *Bava Metzia* 101a; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 375, par. 1.

¹³ *Mishnah*, *Bava Kama* 100b; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 306, par. 3.

¹⁴ *Bava Kama* (see Rashi) and *Shulchan Aruch*, *loc. cit.*; see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, “*Uman*.”

¹⁵ *Bava Kama* 116a ff.; *Mishneh Torah* (“*Hilchos Sechirus*,” ch. 9, par. 8) and *Shulchan Aruch* (“*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 335, par. 3): “He must give him his full wage.”

wage” (even in a case where “he hired him for the sick person at a rate **higher** than it was worth to hire him”).¹⁶

Therefore, it is unclear: Since “the agent executed his mission” in this case, he did all that he could have done with respect to Torah and mitzvos, and what’s more, the work was beneficial (although minimally, relative to the discomfort and pain), it is doubly clear that his wages must be paid in full, including the expenditures (pain) incurred, even though the expenditures exceed the improvement. If so, what is the novelty of the maxim: “The reward is commensurate with the pain”?

2.

IT’S SUPPOSED TO HURT

In the aforementioned cases, the discomfort and labor (the “expenditure”) of the employee are distinct from the benefit (and improvement) that the employer will derive as a result of his work. Even when “the agent executed his mission,” it is only that he did **his** work completely, but the **purpose** for which the **employer** hired him is not (always) **achieved**.

However, in our case, the “pain” of observing Torah and mitzvos is not distinct from the profit and improvement. As Rambam says in *Shemonah Perakim*:

A person who desires and yearns to sin {but ultimately does not capitulate} is more respectable¹⁷ and wholesome than one who has no such desire and is not pained by restraint... {Our Sages} did not suffice with this, but they said that the reward of a person who rules over his desires increases according to the degree of pain involved in ruling over their desires. They said, “**the reward is commensurate with the pain.**” Moreover, they **instructed** that a person ought to desire to sin, etc. A person should not say, ‘I don’t desire... but rather, ‘I desire; yet what can I do? My Father in Heaven has commanded me {to abstain}.’”¹⁸

¹⁶ *Tosafos* on *Bava Kama* 116b, s.v. “*lehavi*.”

¹⁷ {In the original Hebrew, “*chashuv*.”}

¹⁸ *Shemonah Perakim*, ch. 6.

With this in mind, the point of the maxim, “the reward is commensurate with the pain” is even more baffling: The expenditure and pain itself is part of the improvement, to the extent that a person is **commanded** to choose it. So what novelty about the person being rewarded for his pain?

It is very strained to answer that this is actually the novelty of the mishnah, and that this very concept **originates** here, as it might seem from Rambam’s citation of this mishnah in this context. After all, there are many teachings of our Sages to this effect, as mentioned above {so it is highly unlikely that the source for this novelty is this mishnah itself}.

3.

THE EXPLANATION, PART 1

A suggested explanation: The point of the mishnah teaching that “the reward is commensurate with the pain” is as follows: Regular pain, every pain, especially and particularly real pain (without it being combined with the pleasure derived from doing a mitzvah, because we are discussing), the sort of pain associated with observing Torah and mitzvos which the person is **not** obligated to endure, but has taken upon themselves voluntarily.

[On this basis, we can appreciate why this mishnah — “The reward is commensurate with the **pain**” — is found at the end and conclusion of tractate *Avos*, which discusses “matters of piety,”¹⁹ matters that go beyond the letter of the law, as will be explained in Section 5.

This is also alluded to by the fact that the mishnah refers to the author of this maxim (“the reward is commensurate with the pain”) not by his personal name, but with the pseudonym “Ben Hei-Hei.” This underscores that the author was a convert (“a child of Avraham and Sarah, who had the letter **Hei** added to their names”).²⁰ This highlights that the person discussed in the mishnah is someone who accepts pain upon himself for which there was no obligation to do

¹⁹ See *Bava Kama* 30a.

²⁰ *Tosfos* on *Chagigah* 9b.

so at all, similar to the **entire being** of a convert (for a convert is considered like a newborn child): He converts, for which there is no obligation, and at the same time takes upon himself the difficulties and pain of observing all of the Torah and mitzvos.]

Therefore, we might have thought that for such pain, a person would only be rewarded relative to his actual accomplishment and the improvement he makes — as in the case of someone who works in his friend’s field voluntarily, who is rewarded (not for his full expenditures but) only according to the measure of improvement. So our mishnah teaches that “the reward is commensurate with the pain,” that the person is rewarded also for his discomfort and pain (although he was never ordered to do this).

To elucidate — for a convert, this {voluntary acceptance of discomfort} defines his entire existence, yet an analogous phenomenon can happen with every Jew: {For example:} Beautifying a mitzvah,²¹ or an exemplary behavior, or being appointed to a sacred task, and so on — that a Jew accepts upon himself voluntarily.

4.

THE EXPLANATION, PART 2

However, we can still ask: When someone works in his friend’s field, and the owner divulges that he appreciates the work, he must pay the worker for all of his expenses (even if the expenses exceed the improvement),²² and according to this, the question returns: Since Hashem appreciates a person going beyond the letter of the law, doing {even} what he was not instructed to do — what is the novelty of “the reward is commensurate with the pain” [to the extent that this is (as mentioned in Section 3) considered a pious act]?

The explanation is as follows: When a person undertakes {an act requiring} discomfort and pain (in the practice of Torah and mitzvos) which is

²¹ {Original: *Hiddur mitzvah*.}

²² *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 375, par. 3; *Sefer Me’iros Einayim*, subsection 7, loc cit.

not incumbent upon him — such as a *hiddur mitzvah*, noble conduct, and so forth, and afterwards (after having done it three times) he fails to do so — his earlier undertaking of the pain (when done plainly, without articulating that it was done “*bli neder*”²³) is rendered a form of negligence, leading to a loss eventually —

[This is especially so for a convert, who {after converting} does not observe the mitzvos properly; his conversion is a form of negligence. Since “converts are as harmful for the Jewish people as a scab”²⁴ because “they are not well-versed in the details of mitzvah observance, and the Jewish people emulate their actions”²⁵ — and the rule is that we must forestall and forewarn the convert who wishes to convert: “What is motivating you to convert? {This is so that} if he is going to back out, let himw blackout {now}”²⁶ — and since he converted anyway, without considering the resulting hardship (of not observing mitzvos properly), it is considered as if he was negligent] —

Therefore, if not for the novel idea that “the reward is commensurate with the pain,” we could have established that he receives no reward for this pain — just like a worker who agreed to transport “a cask from one place to another” and they broke due to his **negligence** (due to having taken them over an unstable path, and the like), where the rule is that the employer does not need to pay him for his work [on the contrary: the worker must pay for the broken casks];²⁷

The effect of {the maxim}, “the reward is commensurate with the pain” is that even when the pain a person accepted upon themselves caused a loss (as it were) to the employer (Hashem), the person is, nevertheless, paid for his pain and discomfort {in a way that goes} beyond the letter of the law. And as it is with regard to the person who “moves casks from one place to another,” that (if he has nothing to eat) “it is a mitzvah to treat him beyond the letter of the law and give him his wage.”²⁸

²³ {“Lacking the force of a vow.” See chabad.org/3392260 for an explanation of this phrase.}

²⁴ *Yevamos* 47b.

²⁵ *Tosafos*, loc. cit., s.v., “*kashim*”.

²⁶ *Yevamos* 47b.

²⁷ *Bava Metzia* 83a; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” beg. of sec. 304.

²⁸ *Tur* and *Sefer Me’iros Einayim*, loc. cit. Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Hilchos She’eilah Usechirus*,” par. 19.

5.

FULL WAGES

Although this rule (“it is a mitzvah to treat him beyond the letter of the law and give him his wage”) applies specifically when the employer **hired** the worker to move the casks — and in our case, the person is {either} converting or beautifying a mitzvah or adopting a noble conduct voluntarily — since the employer appreciates the worker’s labor in general, then even when he is negligent in one area —

[For example, only one cask broke when moving the casks “in an unsteady place,”²⁹ and the profit from the casks that were moved exceeds the loss of the one broken cask, in which case the employer appreciates the act of moving the casks (he is merely dissatisfied with the method through which the worker did it)],

The employer has to give him his full wage for his work, due to the pious approach (even for moving the cask which was broken). For since the employer appreciates the general act, it is **as if** he had hired him for it.

Therefore, the same is true here: Since the employer (Hashem) appreciates the fact that a person undertakes the discomfort and pain of beautifying a mitzvah, etc. (it is merely that the **method** of this undertaking is not appropriate, without conditioning that it is “*bli neder*”), Hashem gives the full wage for this pain — “the reward is commensurate with the pain.”

The same applies to a convert: Since the actual conversion is something desired by the employer (Hashem), although there was some eventual negligence in the fact that he did not observe the mitzvos with all their details, he is rewarded for his conversion (even though it caused a loss).

²⁹ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Hilchos She’eilah Usechirus*,” par. 19.

6.

IN COMMON WITH CONVERTS

The author of the maxim, “the reward is commensurate with the pain,” is referred to by the pseudonym “Ben Hei-Hei” in order to emphasize that he was a convert, as explained earlier. For although even a Jew by birth can endure pain and discomfort (for Torah and mitzvos) for which he is not obligated to endure by Torah law, it is specifically conversion that entails the acceptance of pain that is **absolutely** not obligatory.

The explanation is as follows:

The **entire** {purpose for the} existence of a Jew is “to serve his Maker.”³⁰ It follows that a person must utilize **all** of his abilities to this end, to the extent that our Sages teach that every Jew “must say, when will my deeds mirror the deeds of my ancestors, Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov?”³¹ It is, therefore, challenging to identify some discomfort and pain in the context of the service of Hashem, in which he is **entirely** not obligated. For even matters that are beyond the letter of the law or matters of piety are ultimately not matters from which a Jew is exempt, since he is **obligated** to serve his Maker with all of his abilities.

Conversely, a convert has no **prior** obligation to convert. (On the contrary, “When a potential convert approaches us to convert, we ask him: What is motivating you to convert, etc?”). Thus, the pain that he undergoes through conversion to observe Torah and mitzvos is **entirely** voluntary.

Nevertheless, this concept (“the reward is commensurate with the pain”) is taught in tractate *Avos*, which is relevant to all Jews (not only converts), for even when a Jew undertakes additional pain in the observance of Torah and mitzvos, in which he is not obligated by Torah law — especially when it goes against his nature and habit, to the point that because of this (the pain and change of

³⁰ End of tractate *Kiddushin*.

³¹ *Tana DeVei Eliyahu Rabbah*, beg. of ch. 25.

routine), it is as if he is undertaking to do something completely new — it is **similar** to a convert converting.

What's more, this mishnah ("the reward is commensurate with the pain") appears (according to numerous versions)³² specifically **at the end (of the mishnahs)**³³ of tractate *Avos*,³⁴ which means that this is the highest degree of matters of piety, as explained earlier. For this mishnah addresses the kind of pain that is completely unaligned with his nature and habit. For that reason, it is a very lofty level of pious conduct.

7.

LIKE CHILDREN OR LIKE SERVANTS

Now, regarding the point made above (in Section 1), that the reward for mitzvah observance is mandated by halachah (that is, according to Torah law, a Jew must be rewarded for observing Torah and mitzvos), we can ask:

Our obligation to pay a worker for his labor (a day-worker, a contractor, etc.) applies specifically to someone with no {pre-existing} obligation to work for the employer, and he works for pay. In contrast, a servant who has an obligation to serve his master, having been acquired by him, or a son who is obligated to serve his father due to the mitzvah and duty of honoring a father,³⁵ are not included in the parameters of paying a worker for his service and work.

Now, since the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem is "whether like children or like servants,"³⁶ and what's more: the purpose of a

³² It appears this way in the Talmud and Mishnah, and also in the first edition of Mishnah (Napoli, 252), Kofman manuscript, Yemen manuscript, Farmah manuscript (1), (3). See also *Shinuyei Nuschaos LaMishnayos*; Kapach edition of Mishnah. Yet in the Alter Rebbe's *Siddur* and multiple siddurim, the chapter concludes with the mishnah, "He would say, at five years...." See *Shinuyei Nuschaos LaMishnayos*, 20.

³³ For ch. 6 of *Pirkei Avos* is a *beraisa*.

³⁴ As for the version that finishes with the mishnah, "He would say, a five year old...." see *Midrash Shmuel* on that mishnah, which states that these are not the words of Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima, nor are they from this tractate, rather the Sages added it here.

³⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Mamrim*," ch. 6, par. 3; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, "*Yoreh Deah*," sec. 240, par. 5.

³⁶ {*Machzor* for Rosh HaShanah, "*Musaf*."}

Jew's creation is "to serve his Creator," it is clear that a Jew's obligation "to serve his Creator" is (by Torah law) much greater than the obligation of a servant to his master — and certainly more than the obligation of a son to his father. So how can we say that a Jew deserves (by Torah law) a reward for serving Hashem?

8.

TWO SIDES OF THE TORAH

The explanation is as follows:

Since Torah and mitzvos were given to the Jewish people by Hashem, it is clear that they have parameters on the part of the giver (Hashem) and parameters on the part of the recipient (the Jewish people).

For this reason, we find two extremes in the Torah: "The words of Torah are not susceptible to impurity" — when studied by a Jew who is in a state of impurity — for they are "**My word** (is like fire):³⁷ **Hashem's** speech. Nevertheless, "a Torah scholar who forgoes his honor, his honor is forgiven," since "it is his Torah"³⁸ (it is as if it were the **Torah scholar's** Torah). In other words, in some respects, the Torah remains within Hashem's domain, and in other respects, it is transferred to the recipient, the Jewish people.

And just as this duality exists concerning Torah and mitzvos themselves, the same is true regarding the obligation to study Torah and perform mitzvos. Both elements are present:

From the perspective of the Giver, the Jewish people have an obligation to observe Torah and mitzvos in the manner of a son's dutiful service to his father and a servant's to his master. From the recipient's perspective, his occupation

³⁷ *Berachos* 22a.

³⁸ *Kiddushin* 32a.

with Torah and mitzvos takes the form of duty that is (by Torah law) associated with receiving a reward, like a contractor and salaried worker.

[These two contradictory definitions of the obligation to observe Torah and mitzvos are (also) expressed in the difference between two categories of mitzvos — the mitzvos (idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder) to which the rule of “be killed and do not transgress” applies, and the other mitzvos, regarding which it is said, “‘which a man shall do and live by them’ — ‘and live by them, not die by them:’”³⁹

In these {latter} mitzvos, the nature of the obligation is **recipient**-oriented, and as a result, the recipient is more prominent — and what’s more, they form the recipient — as our Sages teach, that “I was created {equating to} “and live by them,” in order “to serve my Maker”; whereas in the three former concepts (mitzvos), the nature of the obligation is Giver-oriented, which is why they lack the principle of “transgress {and do not be killed},” but rather — “be killed and do not transgress.”]

9.

RECIPIENT’S REWARDS

This concept regarding the reward for Torah and mitzvos — that it is associated with the parameters of the recipient — is especially emphasized in the fact that the **form** of the reward is “commensurate with the **pain**,” to whatever extent the recipient endured pain and discomfort in the process.

This leads us to a greater understanding of the connection between the teaching of “the reward is commensurate with the pain” and tractate Avos — matters of piety:

The concept of “matters of piety” (beyond the letter of the law) is only applicable from the recipient’s perspective. Conversely, from the Giver’s

³⁹ *Vayikra* 18:5; *Sanhedrin* 74a, and Rashi there; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*,” beg. of ch. 5.

perspective, where the entire purpose of man is only “to serve his Maker,” there is no limit to the obligation to serve Hashem (to the extent that, as mentioned in Section 7, a person is therefore obligated to give up his life {for Hashem}), and consequently, the construct of “beyond the letter of the law” is inapplicable.

This provides (further)⁴⁰ explanation as to why tractate *Avos* begins with the expression, “Moshe **received** the Torah from Sinai” (and not that “Hashem gave the Torah to Moshe at Sinai,” and the like), for the idea of “matters of piety” (the theme of tractate *Avos*) is only applicable in relation to that which is “received”— the perspective of the recipient of Torah and mitzvos.

And the beginning is wedged in the end — it is for this reason that the conclusion of tractate *Avos* is also about reward — and in particular, the concept of “the reward is commensurate with the pain” — for this is all from the perspective of the recipient, as mentioned earlier.

10.

RECIPIENT'S PAIN

That the perspective of the recipient is expressed by the principle that “the reward is commensurate with the pain” is not only true insofar as “the reward” is related to the value of “the pain” and discomfort but also in {the nature of} “the pain” itself, in the type of pain and discomfort.

Since the subject here (as explained in Section 3) is the type of pain sustained by the observance of Torah and mitzvos in which a person is not obligated by Torah law but which he accepts upon himself completely voluntarily — like a convert’s acceptance of mitzvos (pain), which stems entirely from his own choice and desire (as he has no obligation to convert, as explained earlier) — it turns out that **this** “pain” in observing Torah and mitzvos (whether in

⁴⁰ See *Midrash Shmuel* at the beginning of *Avos*, where he provides reasons for why “the matter is attributed to the receiver” and not the Giver (unlike {the following clauses in the mishnah}, “And he gave it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the elders...,” which attributes it to the giver).

reference to the pain of the overall acceptance of mitzvos by a convert, or an act of piety and the like by a Jew), exists exclusively within the perspective of the recipient.

With this, we see another aspect of the relationship between the conclusion of tractate *Avos* and its beginning (in addition to that which was explained in Section 9). For at the Giving of the Torah, when “Moshe received (emphasizing the **recipient’s** perspective of and his theme, as explained earlier) the Torah from Sinai,” all the Jews were also converts.⁴¹

11.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MAXIMS OF BEN BAG-BAG AND BEN HEI-HEI

On this basis, we will also understand the connection between the teaching, “Ben Hei-Hei would say, “The reward is commensurate with the pain,”” and the following teaching, “Ben Bag-Bag would say, ‘Delve into it {the Torah} and delve into it...’” [There are even some versions of the text that combine both teachings in one mishnah⁴²]:

Ben Bag-Bag was also a convert (or a descendant of converts). Just as the pseudonym “Ben Hei-Hei” indicates (as mentioned in Section 3) that he was a convert — “a child of Avraham and Sarah, who had the letter *hei* added to their names” — the pseudonym “Ben Bag-Bag” does the same, for “Ben Bag-Bag” has the numerical value of “*hei hei*”⁴³ [and it is also alluded to by the acrostic in “Bag-Bag:” בן גר בן גיורת, the son of a male convert and the son of a female convert].

For the same reason (as Ben Hei-Hei), the author of this teaching is also referred to (not by his name but) by the pseudonym of Ben Bag-Bag (which

⁴¹ See *Yevamos* 46a-b; *Krisus* 9a.

⁴² This is how it appears in the text of tractate *Avos* in the Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur*.

⁴³ *Tosafos* on *Chagigah* 9b.

refers to his conversion) — to indicate that his status as a convert is related to his teaching, “delve into it and delve into it:”

Since a Noahide is obligated to observe the seven Noahide laws, it is clear that though his Torah study (of the laws and details of the seven mitzvos) is a lofty achievement — to the extent that “a Gentile who studies Torah is like a *kohen gadol*”⁴⁴ — nevertheless, a Noahide’s Torah study is not an end in itself. Rather, it is (like a means) to know how to observe his mitzvos, and it lacks the quality of a Jew’s Torah study. Only after a Gentile converts and becomes obligated to study Torah, as a mitzvah and an end in itself, does his **Torah study** fundamentally change. It acquires the wondrous quality and superiority expressed in the teaching: “Delve **into it** and delve **into it**, for everything is **in it**.”

This is also the connection between “Ben Bag-Bag” and the teaching, “delve into it and delve into it.” Meaning, Ben Bag-Bag was inspired to disseminate this maxim because the directive “delve into it and delve into it” and its virtue is something that a convert is especially sensitive to.

Now we can understand the connection between the two maxims — “Ben Bag-Bag would say, ‘Delve into it...,’” and “Ben Hei-Hei would say, ‘The reward is commensurate with the pain’”: The message of both teachings has special relevance to a convert.

The sequence of the two teachings is precise. The teaching, “delve into it,” referring to Torah study (learning), is followed by the teaching of “the reward is commensurate with the pain,” which refers to the pain and discomfort of performing mitzvos because “learning **leads** to action.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Bava Kama* 38a.

⁴⁵ *Kiddushin* 40b.

12.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE NAMES OF THE AUTHORS AND THEIR MAXIMS

All aspects of the Torah — including the names of the authors of Torah teachings — are absolutely precise. Therefore, it is clear that the connection between these two teachings (“delve into it” and “commensurate with the pain”) and the two Sages (Ben Bag-Bag and Ben Hei-Hei) is not only in the general sense of them both being converts but also in the sense that their **distinct** names allude to the **diverse** concepts in their two teachings.

[Proof for this: According to one opinion,⁴⁶ “Ben Bag-Bag” and “Ben Hei-Hei” are two names for the same *Tanna*. Since he is called “Ben Bag-Bag,” for the teaching, “delve into it,” and he is called “Ben Hei-Hei, for the teaching, “commensurate with the pain,” we **must** say that the difference between these names reflects the difference between the two teachings.]

The explanation is as follows:

The pseudonym, “Ben Hei-Hei” (author of the teaching, “the reward is commensurate with the pain”) alludes to him being a convert more distinctly than the pseudonym, “Ben Bag-Bag.” As *Rashbam* puts it (quoting Rabbi Yehuda, son of the *Rosh*): “Bag-Bag (which only has the numerical value of *hei hei*) is more hidden and obscured.”

Similarly, there is a difference between their teachings: “Delve into it” implies that there is something “hidden and obscured” into which a person needs to delve once and again, whereas “pain” is something very visible.

To explain: “Delve into it and delve into it” primarily refers (as explained in Section 11) to the study of Torah as a purpose and end in itself (studying in order to understand and grasp Hashem’s Torah, and not only “to know what to do”). So, clearly, this does not include the only aspects of halachah that are practically relevant (revealed matters), but primarily, the study of the debate

⁴⁶ *Midrash Shmuel* here, quoting Rabbi Yosef ben Nachmiash quoting, “there are those that say.”

(leading to the halachah) and the like. (And even after the debate, there can remain some “hiddenness,” and the debate can continue).

As the commentaries⁴⁷ explain the meaning of “delve into it and delve into it”:

Since we find... that he would expound 49 interpretations to render something impure, and 49 interpretations to render something pure, even when these contradicted those.... Therefore, he said... “delve into it and delve into it.” Meaning, expound contradictory ideas, exploring angles to render something pure, and angles to render something impure. For everything is in it, and “these and these are the words of the living G-d.”⁴⁸

On this basis, it turns out that the difference between “the reward is commensurate with the pain” and “delve into it...” is the difference between “revelation” and “concealment”: The pain (of observing Torah and mitzvos) that a Jew accepts upon himself pertains to a specific (revealed) thing (a practice or the like). In contrast, “delve into it” introduces a novelty: The person is engaged in learning (also) the part of Torah (debate — 49 interpretations this way and 49 interpretations that way), in which the directives are “indistinct and are not explicated, revealed, or known.”⁴⁹

Therefore, in both teachings the subject of conversion is emphasized (and that is the point of both teachings). Nonetheless, in the maxim, “delve,” this subject is alluded to in the author’s name in a concealed and obscure way, whereas in the maxim, “the reward is commensurate with the pain,” the subject is alluded to in a revealed way.

— From talks delivered on the 10th, 13th and 15th of Shevat, 5739 (1979)

⁴⁷ *Midrash Shmuel* here. See *Hemshech* 5666 p. 417, et passim; and earlier, p. 409, et passim.

⁴⁸ *Eruvin* 13b.

⁴⁹ Wording of the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya*, “*Iggeres Hakodesh*,” ch. 29.