



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Pirkei Avos | Kol Yisrael

We All Have a Share

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## 1.

### WHY THIS MISHNAH?

Before learning a chapter of *Pirkei Avos*,<sup>1</sup> it is a Jewish custom to recite the *mishnah*:<sup>2</sup> “All Israel have a share in the World to Come, as it says: ‘And your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever; they are the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, in which to take pride.’”<sup>3</sup> This custom suggests that the message of this *mishnah* (regarding the reward for all Jews in the World to Come) is particularly suited to serve as an introduction to the study of tractate *Avos*.

We need to clarify: The World to Come is the reward for the **entirety** of a person’s *avodah*<sup>4</sup> of Torah and *mitzvos*, including its every detail — not only for observing the “lessons of *Avos*.” So why do we recite specifically this *mishnah* before learning tractate *Avos*?

## 2.

### COMBINING OPPOSITES

We find two paradoxical principles underpinning the lessons of *Pirkei Avos*:

On one hand, the theme of this tractate is — to quote Rav Ovadiah Bartenura<sup>5</sup> — “ethics and character traits,” which are not included among the Torah’s commandments. We also find that “non-Jewish scholars also composed works... which they fabricated from their hearts, containing ethical guidelines as to how a person should relate to his fellow.” The need to address such matters

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<sup>1</sup> {It is customary to study one chapter of *Pirkei Avos* each Shabbos after *Mincha*, between Pesach and Rosh HaShanah.}

<sup>2</sup> *Sanhedrin* 10:1.

<sup>3</sup> *Yeshayahu* 60:21.

<sup>4</sup> {Lit. “service.” A broad term used to denote a person’s efforts in serving Hashem.}

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the tractate.

stems from the coarseness and lowliness of man, which can lead to bad traits, etc.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, our Sages say that “one who wishes to be **pious** should fulfill... the teachings of *Avos*,”<sup>7</sup> indicating that the lessons of *Avos* are linked with the level of a *chassid* {defined as one} who serves Hashem beyond the letter of the law.

The same paradox can be seen in the rationale for **learning** tractate *Avos*:

One of the reasons for learning this tractate specifically every Shabbos between Pesach and Shavuos is because the “bodily cravings” are awakened then; therefore, this tractate, which is “full of admonitions, and inspires a person to pursue every good trait,”<sup>8</sup> is learned.

Conversely, the custom is that **every Jew** — from the least spiritually developed, at the very beginning of their *avodah*, to the greatest of the great, who is no longer at all disturbed by “bodily cravings” — studies *Pirkei Avos* during this period.

The explanation of these opposites and their synthesis comes from the introduction: “All Israel have a share in the World to Come,” as will be explained.

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<sup>6</sup> See, at length, *Derech Chaim*, by Maharal, beg. of *Avos*, his explanation of this *mishnah*.

<sup>7</sup> *Bava Kamma* 30a.

<sup>8</sup> Introduction to *Midrash Shmuel*.

### 3.

#### THE WORLD TO COME VS. THE RESURRECTION

This will be clarified by {prefacing with} the well-known explanation of this *mishnah*:<sup>9</sup>

“The World to Come” refers to the world of resurrection<sup>10</sup> — souls invested in bodies. The novelty of the {statement of the} *mishnah*:<sup>11</sup> The reward in *Gan Eden*<sup>12</sup> — the realm of souls — is not the same for “all Israel” (to the extent that certain people don’t even merit to experience it).<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the World to Come — the Resurrection of the Dead, when souls will re-inhabit their bodies — is (primarily) granted “equally to all Israel”:<sup>14</sup> “**All** Israel have a **share** in the World to Come.”

The reason for this: *Gan Eden* — souls without bodies — is (primarily) given as a reward for a person’s Torah study, which is primarily associated with the **soul** (and its faculty of intellect). The Resurrection of the Dead is the reward for fulfilling *mitzvos*, which are performed specifically with, and by, the **body** (which is why the soul receives this reward when it is reunited with the body).<sup>15</sup>

Since there are (necessarily)<sup>16</sup> varying degrees of capacity among Jews when it comes to **comprehending** Torah, from one extreme to the other,<sup>17</sup> it follows that Jews are not all equal concerning the reward for this *avodah* — i.e., *Gan Eden*.

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<sup>9</sup> See also *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 3 (par. 6 ff.), ch. 4; *Meiri’s Chibur HaTeshuvah*; et al.

<sup>10</sup> *Bartenura* (et al.) on *Sanhedrin*, beg. of ch. “*Chelek*”; *Midrash Shmuel* on this *mishnah*; See sources noted in the Rebbe’s *Teshuvos UBiurim*, sec. 8, note 1.

<sup>11</sup> For sources on the foregoing discussion, see *Torah Or*, “*Yisro*,” 73b (and see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shelach*,” 46d); *Maamar Ki Yishalcha* 5679, ch. 1; *Maamar Ki Yishalcha* 5700, ch. 1; *Hemshech* 5672, vol. 2, p. 1112 ff.; see at length, *Teshuvos UBiurim*, loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> {A temporary repository for souls, from after a person’s death until the coming of Moshiach, the details of which will be discussed presently in the *sichah*.}

<sup>13</sup> See *Chagigah* 15b, that if not for Rabbi Meir’s prayer, Acher would not have entered *Gan Eden*; see *Chagigah* 15a: “he acquired his portion and that of his (wicked) colleague in *Gan Eden*.”

<sup>14</sup> Wording of *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shelach*,” 6d.

<sup>15</sup> See *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 17; and see at length *Derech Mitzvosecha*, “*Mitzvas Tzitzis*,” ch. 1; *Maamar Ki Yishalcha* 5679, ch. 1; et al.

<sup>16</sup> To ensure the wholeness of the entire “person” of the Jewish people, there must be a head and a foot, etc.

<sup>17</sup> See end of *Maamar BeShaah SheHikdimu* 5672; et al.

In contrast, *mitzvos* primarily involve **action**, which everyone can do. And every Jew **does** perform *mitzvos*, to the extent (as our Sages teach) that even the sinners among the Jewish people are “full of *mitzvos* as a pomegranate is full of seeds.”<sup>18</sup> Since every Jew is occupied with the performance of *mitzvos*, we can say that “all Israel have a share in the World to Come.”

#### 4.

##### THE DECEPTIVE SIMPLICITY OF ACTION

However, we need to clarify: If the primary reward is granted in the period of (i.e., after) the Resurrection of the Dead, this intimates that this reward is superior to the reward of *Gan Eden*. How does this align with *Gan Eden* as a reward for a more exalted form of *avodah* (understanding Torah) which is necessarily different from one Jew to the next, whereas the reward of the resurrection is for performing *mitzvos*, a much “simpler” form of *avodah*, which is consequently accessible to every Jew?

The explanation is as follows: Although on the surface, all Jews are equal concerning action because an action is the most inferior of human abilities, for action is not contingent on one’s emotions or intellectual understanding. The deeper reason for this parity is that there is a **superior** quality to action, as the *mishnah* in *Avos* teaches:<sup>19</sup> “Deed is primary.”

Hashem’s inner intention is that the Jewish people should fashion a home for Him in the **lowest realms**, in this lowest of worlds; there is none lower than it,<sup>20</sup> as it says “the last action was foremost in mind.”<sup>21</sup> **This** intention is accomplished principally through the *avodah* of practical *mitzvos*, by which the

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<sup>18</sup> *Chagigah* 27a.

<sup>19</sup> *Avos* 1:17.

<sup>20</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Lecha Dodi* prayer. See also *Torah Or*, beg. of *Vayigash*.

refinement and purification of a person's body and worldly matters are achieved, as explained in *Tanya*<sup>22</sup> at length.

Since all Jews are — as the verse says (cited as proof in our *mishnah*) — “the branch of My planting, the work of My hands,” **every** Jew perceives this purpose and executes it practically. At the level of conscious awareness of Hashem,<sup>23</sup> there are distinctions between one Jew and another (to the degree that some person may be totally incapable of any such awareness). Yet, when it comes to the intent of *Atzmus*<sup>24</sup> “to fashion a home for Him in the lowest realms” — which is perceived within the **essence** of a Jew — all Jews are equal.

## 5.

BODY > SOUL

This is also why, in the World to Come, reward is given specifically to souls encloded in bodies:

Being that Hashem intended to have a home in the lowest realms, this is reflected in the Jewish people — who are, so to speak, one with *Atzmus* — by Hashem choosing their **bodies**<sup>25</sup> (and not only their souls).

[This is why even the body of a Jew exists eternally, never to decompose. As known, the *luz* bone<sup>26</sup> never decomposes,<sup>27</sup> and the entire body will be reconstituted from it at the time of the resurrection.]

Therefore, when the *avodah* of refining and purifying the world will be complete, and the world will become a home for Hashem, Hashem's choice of

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<sup>22</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 37.

<sup>23</sup> {In the succinct Hebrew original, “*giluim*.”}

<sup>24</sup> {Lit. “Essence.” The term used in Chassidus and Kabbalah to denote the absolute Essence of Hashem, beyond all definition.}

<sup>25</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 49. And at length — *Sefer HaSichos, Toras Shalom*, p. 120 ff.

<sup>26</sup> {[A bone located at the very top of the spine, according to the Arizal.](#)}

<sup>27</sup> *Bereishis Rabba* 28:3; *Zohar*, vol. 2, p. 28b; *Tosafos* on *Bava Kama* 16b, s.v., “*vehu*.”

the Jewish body (as well) will be revealed to Jews, which results in the eternal life of the body (also) in the World to Come.

## 6.

### WE ALL HAVE A SHARE

Based on this, we can understand why this *mishnah* (“All Israel”) serves as the introduction to the study of tractate *Avos*:

In order to express how the application and study of tractate *Avos* — which leads to the refinement and purification of the corporeality of the body — is expected of **every** Jew, we introduce the study with “All Israel have a portion in the World to Come” (referring to the Resurrection of the Dead — souls invested in bodies). This is because the **bodies** of “All Israel” are (also) “the work of My hands.” In fact, it says specifically that in “**the work of My hands**” do I “**take pride**,” because specifically “the last action” was “foremost in mind.”

This is why no Jew can “desist from it”<sup>28</sup> — from fulfilling the lessons of *Avos* — at both ends of the spectrum:

Since the body of **every** Jew is Hashem’s handiwork, every body **can** be refined; it is **impossible** for a body to be incapable of refinement. Moreover, since the body is Hashem’s handiwork, we can be certain that no Jew will be left behind,<sup>29</sup> and all surely **will** be refined eventually.

Conversely, engaging in this *avodah* is not beneath the dignity of any Jew; on the contrary, the real lessons of piety can be found in the work of refining and purifying the body. Because specifically in “the work of My hands,” I “take pride,” as discussed above — “the last action was foremost in mind.”

— Based on a Chassidic discourse and a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Acharei*, 5733 (1973)

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<sup>28</sup> *Avos* 2:16.

<sup>29</sup> See *Toras Shalom*, p. 135, p. 11.