



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Pirkei Avos | Kol Yisroel

The Preface:

Before studying the weekly chapter of *Pirkei Avos*, it is customary to say the following paragraph from the *Mishnah*:

“Every Jew has a share in the World to Come, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 60:21):
“And your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever. They are the branch of My planting, the work of My hand in which to take pride.”
(*Sanhedrin* 10:1)

What relevance does this *Mishnah* have to the study of *Pirkei Avos*? To clarify this, we will first examine the *Mishnah* itself.

Which World to Come?

The World to Come mentioned in this *Mishnah* is the Resurrection of the Dead. The novel point made by the *Mishnah* is that not all Jews receive equal reward in *Gan Eden* — a heavenly realm where disembodied souls receive their reward for their accomplishments in Torah study. A person’s spiritual reward commensurate with his intellectual and spiritual achievements . But “every Jew has a share in the World to Come.” The restoration of the soul within a body is the reward for the physical fulfillment of *mitzvos*, and because “every Jew is full of *mitzvos*,” therefore, “every Jew has a share in the World to Come.”

The reason why the ultimate reward — the World to Come, i.e., the Resurrection — is the reward reserved for the relatively simple task of the physical fulfillment of *mitzvos* and not for the loftier work of Torah study is that G-d’s essential desire is to have a home in the physical world. This is

accomplished when a Jew uses his physical body or possessions to fulfill the Divine will. Every Jew, being a “branch of My planting, the work of My hand...,” innately feels the urgency of the Divine desire, and therefore performs *mitzvos*.

The reward of resurrection thus mirrors the work of refining the physical. G-d desires the physical, and therefore He delights not just in the soul of the Jew but his body as well. When we reveal how the physical realm is a home for G-d, the Divine choice of our bodies is manifest, and they are eternally restored.

Why We Study:

Two divergent pedagogical goals are given for the study of *Pirkei Avos*: *Bartenura* explains that the goal of this tractate is to teach a person that he must take moral and ethical instruction from Torah, even though there are other, secular sources for moral wisdom. Meaning, *Pirkei Avos* provides a person with baseline moral instruction.

Our Sages, however, also said that “a person who wants to be pious should study Avos.” (*Bava Kama* 30a) A pious person, in this context, means one whose behavior goes beyond the letter of the law — beyond the baseline of morality.

There is a similar tension in the explanations as to why we study *Pirkei Avos* in the summertime. One commentator explains that the moral instruction of *Avos* is necessary to temper the physical desires that increase in summertime. (*Midrash Shmuel, Hakdama to Avos*) On the other hand, the fact that all Jews, even those who do not struggle with physical lust and desire, study *Pirkei Avos*, implies that the lessons of *Avos* are addressed to those who occupy a loftier station as well.

We are now in position to understand why the preface to *Pirkei Avos* is the teaching that “Every Jew has a share in the World to Come.”

The theme of *Avos* is refining a person's behavior and interpersonal conduct — his more earthly elements. As an introduction, the *Mishnah* tells us that this work is imperative for, and accessible to, every Jew. Because the body of a Jew is “the branch of My planting, the work of My hand,” every Jew can and must refine his physical self through the teachings of *Avos*. Nobody is too base or degenerate.

At the same time, a lofty person cannot excuse himself from engaging with the physical by claiming it is beneath him, because the deepest act of piety is to refine the physical so that G-d can “take pride” in the work of His people.