

מִסְכֵּת אָבוֹת • פֶּרֶק רִאשׁוֹן

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

We begin our learning of Pirkei Avos by establishing the golden chain of the mesorah, tracing how Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah at Sinai and passed it down through the generations. This holy transmission went from Yehoshua to the elders, the prophets, and the Men of the Great Assembly, showing us that our oral tradition is unbroken and divine. From there, the chapter introduces the early pairs of Sages, the Zugos, who carried the torch of Torah with immense holiness.

As we delve into their teachings, we find fundamental guidance for our daily avodah and yiras Shamayim. The Sages guide us on how to build a home of Torah, how to conduct ourselves in judgment, how to treat our fellow Jews with warmth, and how to guard our speech. We are introduced to the timeless wisdom of Hillel and Shammai, who teach us the path of peace, diligence in learning, and serving Hashem with absolute sincerity.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

מִשְׁנָה א

Mishna 1 • The Chain of Torah Transmission and the Three Directives of the Great Assembly

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי,

Moshe received Torah from Sinai, directly from Hashem,

וּמֹסְרָהּ לְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ,

and he transmitted it to Yehoshua, his faithful disciple,

וְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים,

and Yehoshua transmitted it to the elders who succeeded him,

וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים,

and the elders transmitted it to the prophets,

וְנָבִיאִים מְסֻרוֹתָם לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגָּדוֹלָה.

and the prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly.

הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים,

They said three things as guiding principles for the leaders of the generation:

הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בִּדְיִן,

Be deliberate in judgment, taking your time to analyze the case carefully,

וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה,

and establish many disciples, teaching Torah to all who wish to learn,

וַעֲשׂוּ סִגָּ לַתּוֹרָה:

and make a fence for the Torah to protect its sacred mitzvos from being violated.

מִשְׁנָה ב

Mishna 2 · The Three Pillars Upon Which the World Stands

שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשְׁפָּרֵי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה.

Shimon the Righteous was from the remnants of the Great Assembly, the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah.

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר,

He would constantly say:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד,

On three things the world stands and is sustained:

עַל הַתּוֹרָה

on the Torah, which we must study and keep,

וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה

and on the Temple service, which brings us close to Hashem,

וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִּים:

and on acts of kindness that we perform for one another.

מִשְׁנָה ג

Mishna 3 · Serving Hashem Out of Love and the Fear of Heaven

אַנְטִיגֶנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק.

Antigonus, a man of Socho, received the Torah tradition from Shimon the Righteous.

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר,

He would constantly say to his talmidim:

אַל תִּהְיוּ כַעֲבָדִים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס,

Do not be like servants who serve the master on condition to receive a reward, for that is serving out of self-interest;

אֲלָא יִהְיוּ כַעֲבָדִים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׂלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס,

but rather, be like servants who serve the master not on condition to receive a reward, serving Hashem purely out of love;

וְיִהְיֶה מִוְרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם:

and let the fear of Heaven be upon you, so that you have both love and awe of Hashem.

מִשְׁנָה ד

Mishna 4 • The Transmission of Torah and Honoring the Sages

יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרֵדָה

Yose ben Yoezer, who was a man of Zeredah,

וְיוֹסִי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

and Yose ben Yochanan, who was a man of Yerushalayim,

קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.

received the Torah tradition from them, the previous leaders of the Sanhedrin.

יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרֵדָה אוֹמֵר,

Yose ben Yoezer, the man of Zeredah, says:

יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בֵּית וַעַד לַחֲכָמִים,

Let your house be a house of meeting for the Sages, so that talmidei chachamim will always find a welcoming place to gather and discuss Torah in your home,

וְהָיָה מִתְאַבֵּק בְּעָפָר רַגְלֵיהֶם,

and be attaching yourself in the dust of their feet, sitting humbly on the ground before them to absorb their teachings,

וְהָיָה שׁוֹתֵה בְּצָמָא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם:

and be drinking with thirst — their words, eagerly taking in every holy word of Torah they speak.

מִשְׁנָה ה

Mishna 5 • Hospitality to the Poor and Limiting Conversation with Women

יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אוֹמֵר,

Yose son of Yochanan, a man of Yerushalayim, says:

יְהִי בֵיתְךָ פֶּתוּחַ לְרוֹחָה,

Let your house be open wide to guests,

וְיִהְיוּ עֲנִיִּים בְּנֵי בֵיתְךָ,

and let poor people be members of your household, so they can find sustenance there with dignity.

וְאַל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה.

And do not increase conversation with the woman.

בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ אָמְרוּ,

Even regarding **his own wife they said** this, that one should not engage in idle chatter,

קַל וְחֹמֶר בְּאִשְׁתַּי חִבְרוּ.

and it is a **light and heavy** logical deduction, a kal vachomer, that this applies **with the wife of his fellow**.

מִכָּאן אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים,

From here the Sages said:

כָּל זְמַן שֶׁאָדָם מִרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה,

All the time that a man increases conversation with the woman,

גּוֹרֵם רָעָה לְעַצְמוֹ,

he **causes evil to himself** by bringing about improper thoughts,

וּבֹטֵל מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה,

and he **desists from words of Torah**, wasting precious time that should be spent in learning,

וְסוֹפוֹ יוֹרֵשׁ גֵּיהֵנוֹם:

and his **end** is that he **inherits Gehinnom**.

מִשְׁנָה ו

Mishna 6· Appointing a Teacher, Acquiring a Companion, and Judging Others Favorably

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִטַּי הָאַרְבֵּלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.

Yehoshua son of Perachyah and Nittai the Arbelite **received the tradition from them**, from Yosei ben Yoezer and Yosei ben Yochanan.

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר,

Yehoshua son of Perachyah says:

עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רַב,

Make for yourself a **teacher** to guide you in Torah and halacha,

וְקַנֵּה לָךְ חֵבֵר,

and **acquire for yourself a companion** to study with and grow in yiras Shamayim,

וְהָיִי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּתוֹ:

and be judging — every man to the scale of merit, always giving them the benefit of the doubt.

משנה ז

Mishna 7 · Distancing Oneself from an Evil Neighbor and the Wicked

נִתַּי הָאֲרֵבֶּלִי אוֹמֵר,

Nittai the Arbelite says:

הֲרַחֵק מִשְׁכּוֹן רָע,

Distance yourself from a neighbor who is evil, so that you do not learn from his bad deeds,

וְאַל תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע,

and do not associate with the wicked person, even if he is not your immediate neighbor,

וְאַל תִּתְיָאֵשׁ מִן הַפְּרָעוֹנוֹת:

and do not despair of retribution, but remember that Hashem runs the world and justice will ultimately be served.

משנה ח

Mishna 8 · The Conduct of a Judge Toward Litigants

יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבְּבַאי וְשִׁמּוֹן בֶּן שֶׁטַח קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.

Yehudah son of Tabbai and Shimon son of Shetach received the Torah tradition from them, from the previous zugos.

יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבְּבַאי אוֹמֵר, אַל תַּעַשׂ עֲצָמָה כְּעוֹרְכֵי הַדִּינִין.

Yehudah son of Tabbai says, do not make yourself like the arrangers of the judges, by acting as a lawyer who coaches the litigants on what to argue.

וְכִשְׁיָהּיוּ בְּעֵינֵי דִינָין עוֹמְדִים לְפָנֶיהָ, יִהְיוּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ כְּרָשָׁעִים.

And when the masters of judgment, the litigants, are standing before you in court, they should be in your eyes like wicked ones, meaning you must suspect both of lying and remain completely impartial.

וְכִשְׁנִפְטָרִים מִלְּפָנֶיהָ, יִהְיוּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ כְּזָכָאִין,

And when they are dismissed from before you after the trial, they should be in your eyes like innocent ones, and you must judge them favorably,

כְּשֶׁקִּבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַדִּין:

when they accepted upon themselves the verdict of the judgment.

שמעון בן שטח אומר,

Shimon the son of Shetach says to the judges:

הוי מרבה לחקר את העדים,

be much to investigate — cross-examining the witnesses thoroughly to find any contradictions,

והוי זהיר בדבריה,

and be careful with your words when you question them,

שלא מתוכם ילמדו לשקר:

lest from within them — from the hints in your questions — they will learn to lie and fabricate a story.

שמעיה ואבטליון קבלו מהם.

Shemaiah and Abtalion received the tradition of the Torah from them, from Yehudah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shatach.

שמעיה אומר, אהב את המלאכה,

Shemaiah says, love — work, so that a person can support himself and not rely on others,

ושנא את הרבנות,

and hate — lordship and positions of power over the community,

ואל תתודע לרשות:

and do not make yourself known to the ruling authority, for they draw a person close only for their own benefit.

אבטליון אומר,

Avtalyon says:

חכמים, הזהרו בדבריכם,

Sages, be careful with your words,

שלא תחובו חובת גלות

lest you will obligate yourselves to the obligation of exile,

וְתִגְלוּ לְמָקוֹם מַיִם הָרָעִים,

and you will be exiled to a place of evil waters of heretical teachings,

וְיִשְׁתּוּ הַתַּלְמִידִים הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיכֶם וְיָמוּתוּ,

and the disciples who come after you will drink from these teachings and they will die spiritually,

וְנִמְצָא שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם מְתַחֵל:

and it will be found that the Name of Heaven is profaned.

משנה יב

Mishna 12: The Conduct of Hillel to Love Peace and Draw Creations Close to Torah

הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.

Hillel and Shammai received the tradition of the Torah from them, the previous leaders of the Sanhedrin.

הֵלֵל אוֹמֵר,

Hillel says in his teachings: Be

הָיוּ מֵתַלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן,

among the disciples of Aharon the Kohen Gadol, who was famous for his ways of chessed, by

אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם,

loving peace and pursuing peace between people, and

אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת

loving the creations, even those who seem far from Torah, and by

וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה:

drawing them close to the Torah through warmth and darkei noam.

משנה יג

Mishna 13: The Danger of Seeking Fame and Neglecting Torah Study

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר,

He, Hillel, used to say:

נִגְדָה שְׁמָא, אֶבֶד שְׁמָה.

One who makes great his name for his own self-aggrandizement, destroys his name and loses his reputation.

וְדָלָא מוֹסִיף, יִסָּף.

And one who does **not add** to his Torah learning **ceases** and his existing knowledge will decrease.

וְדָלָא יְלִיף, קָטָלָא חֵיב.

And one who does **not learn** Torah at all, **death** he **deserves** at the hands of Heaven.

וְדֹאשְׁתִּימָשׁ בְּתַנְגָּא, חֵלִי:

And one who makes **use of the crown** of Torah for his personal benefit **passes away** from the world.

משנה יד

Mishna 14 · The Obligation of Personal Responsibility and Avoiding Procrastination

הוא הֵיָה אוֹמֵר,

He, Hillel, **used to say** to inspire people in their avodas Hashem:

אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי.

If I **am not for myself**, meaning if I do not arouse my own neshama to do mitzvot, **who** will be **for me** to help me acquire merit?

וּכְשָׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי.

And **when I am for myself** alone, relying only on my own limited righteousness, **what am I** and what is my worth before Hashem?

וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתִי:

And **if not now**, while I still have life and the opportunity in this world, **when** will I ever do it?

משנה טו

Mishna 15 · Making Torah Study Fixed, Speaking Little and Doing Much, and Welcoming Everyone Warmly

שָׁמַאי אוֹמֵר,

Shammai says:

עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קֹבֵעַ.

Make your Torah study **fixed** and primary, rather than secondary.

אָמַר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הֶרֶב,

Say little and **do much**, promising little but performing a great deal for others,

וְהָיִי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם

and be receiving of every person

בְּסִפּוּר פָּנִים יָפוּת:

with a cheerful expression of face, showing them warmth and kindness.

רבן גמליאל היה אומר,

Rabban Gamliel would say:

עשה לך רב,

Make for yourself a teacher to guide you in halachic decisions,

והסתלק מן הספק,

and remove yourself from doubt by avoiding situations where the law is unclear,

ואל תרבה לעשר אמודות:

and do not increase to tithe your produce by estimation, but rather measure it precisely to avoid any uncertainty.

שמעון בנו אומר,

Shimon his son says in his father's name:

כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים,

All my days I grew up among the Sages, the great Torah scholars of the generation,

ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה.

and I did not find for the body anything better than silence, which guards a person from forbidden speech.

ולא המדרש הוא העקר,

And it is not the study of Torah that is the main thing on its own,

אלא המעשה.

but the action, the actual fulfillment of the mitzvos.

וכל המרבה דברים, מביא חטא:

And anyone who increases words unnecessarily brings about sin.

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר,

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says,

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד,

on three things the world stands:

על הדין

on justice,

ועל האמת

and on truth,

ועל השלום,

and on peace,

שנאמר זכריה ח

as it is said in the Sefer of Zechariah, chapter 8,

אמת ומשפט שלום שפטו בשעריכם:

"truth and judgment of peace judge in your gates."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter opens with the Men of the Great Assembly and Shimon the Righteous establishing the pillars of the world, followed by Antigonus of Socho's warning to serve Hashem without expecting reward. We then progress through the teachings of the Zugos: Yose ben Yoezer and Yose ben Yochanan on bringing Sages and the poor into our homes; Yehoshua ben Perachiah and Nittai the Arbelite on acquiring teachers and avoiding evil neighbors; Yehudah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shetach on careful justice; and Shemaiah and Abtalion on avoiding the ruling power and guarding one's words. Finally, Hillel and Shammai teach us to pursue peace, fix our Torah study, and receive everyone with a pleasant countenance, leading into the instructions of Rabban Gamaliel and his son Shimon on silence and action, and concluding with Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel's declaration that the world stands on justice, truth, and peace.

My dear friend, look at how this first chapter of Pirkei Avos begins. It does not start with abstract philosophies, but with a chain of transmission: Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and passed it down, generation after generation, until it reached us. This tells us that our Torah is not a theory; it is a living, breathing legacy of connection. When you learn, you are not just reading a book, you are joining a chain of holy souls. And what do these sages tell us? They tell us that the world stands on Torah, avodah, and gemilus chasadim, and that the ultimate goal of all our learning is not just to speak, but to do. Shimon his son says it clearly: 'Study is not the most important thing, but actions.'

Think about Shammai's golden rule: 'Say little, but do much, and receive all men with a pleasant countenance.' How often do we promise ourselves or others big things, only to fall short? The Torah wants us to build our lives on quiet, solid action. When you greet another Yid with a warm, genuine smile, you are literally sustaining the world. You are bringing the peace and truth that Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel says keeps the world standing.

Let us also take to heart the famous words of Hillel: 'If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for my own self, what am I? And if not now, when?' We cannot wait for someone else to do our avodah for us, nor can we live only for ourselves. We must step up, take responsibility for our spiritual growth, and do it today, without putting it off.

Today, choose one small, concrete action instead of just talking about it. When you meet someone, greet them with a genuine, warm smile and a pleasant countenance, and make a fixed five minutes to learn Torah today without any distractions.