

מִסְכֵּת אָבוֹת • פֶּרֶק רְבִיעִי

Complete Word-for-Word Interlinear • Navy & Gold Edition

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this beautiful chapter of Pirkei Avos, our holy Sages guide us on how to refine our middos and elevate our daily avodah. We begin with the famous teachings of Ben Zoma, who redefines true wisdom, strength, wealth, and honor, showing us that real success lies in our inner spiritual state and our yiras Shamayim. The Mishnah then urges us to run after even the smallest mitzvah, warning us of how one transgression can lead to another, and reminds us to treat every single person with respect, as everyone has their hour and place.

As we progress through the chapter, the Tannaim teach us about the immense sanctity of the Torah and the proper attitude we must have toward its study. We learn about the severity of profaning Hashem's name, the importance of learning in order to practice, and the warning not to use the crown of Torah for personal gain. The Sages also share profound insights on the relationship between our efforts in this world—which is compared to a vestibule—and the ultimate reward in the World to Come, helping us focus our hearts on what truly matters.

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

מִשְׁנָה א

הַגְדֵּרֶת חָכָם גִּבּוֹר עָשִׂיר וּמְכָבֵד

Mishna 1 · Defining the Truly Wise Mighty Rich and Honored Person

בֶּן זֹמָא אוֹמֵר, אֵיזְהוּ חָכָם, הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר תְּהִלִּים קִיט

119 Tehillim as it is said man from every he who learns wise Who is says Zoma Ben

מִכָּל מְלַמְדֵי הַשְּׂכָלְתִּי כִּי עֲדוּתֶיךָ שִׁיחָה לִּי. אֵיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר, הַכּוֹבֵשׁ

he who subdues mighty Who is to me are a discussion Your testimonies for I gained wisdom my teachers From all

אֶת יָצְרוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלִי טַז טוֹב אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשָּׁל

and one who rules than a mighty man to anger is one slow Better 16 Mishlei as it is said his inclination —

בְּרוּחוֹ מְלִכָּד עִיר. אֵיזְהוּ עָשִׂיר, הַשֹּׂמֵחַ בְּחֶלְקוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר תְּהִלִּים

Tehillim as it is said in his portion he who rejoices rich Who is a city than one who captures his spirit

כַּח יִגִּיעַ כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ. אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ,

Praiseworthy are you for you and it is good praiseworthy are you you eat when your hands The labor of 128

בְּעוֹלָם הָזֶה. וְטוֹב לָךְ, לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. אֵיזְהוּ מְכָבֵד, הַמְּכַבֵּד אֶת

— he who honors honored Who is to come in the world for you and it is good this in this world

הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שְׁמוּאֵל א ב כִּי מְכַבְּדִי אֶכְבֵּד וּבְזִי

and those who despise I will honor those who honor me For 2 I Shmuel as it is said the creations me

יִקְלוּ:

will be degraded

Ben Zoma redefines worldly virtues like wisdom, strength, wealth, and honor through a spiritual and ethical lens based on Tanach.

משנה ב

הַרְיִזוּת פְּמִצּוֹת וְהִפְרִיחָה מִן הָעֲבָרָה

Mishna 2 · Alacrity in Performing Mitzvos and Fleeing from Transgression

בֶּן עֲזַאי אוֹמֵר, הָיִי רָץ לְמִצְוָה קֹלָה כְּבִתְמוּרָה, וּבוֹרֵחַ מִן הָעֲבָרָה.
the transgression from and fleeing as to a grave one light to a mitzvah running be says Azzai Ben
שְׂמִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, וְעִבְרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבָרָה. שְׂשֹׁכֵר מִצְוָה, מִצְוָה.
is a mitzvah a mitzvah for the reward of a transgression drags and a transgression a mitzvah drags for a mitzvah
וְשֹׁכֵר עֲבָרָה, עֲבָרָה:
is a transgression a transgression and the reward of

Ben Azzai teaches that performing one mitzvah naturally leads to another, while committing one sin leads to further sin.

משנה ג

הַעֲרַכְתָּ כָּל אָדָם וְכָל דָּבָר

Mishna 3 · Valuing Every Person and Every Thing

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אַל תְּהִי בָּז לְכָל אָדָם, וְאַל תְּהִי מִפְּלִיג לְכָל דָּבָר,
thing any excluding be and do not man of any despising be do not say used to He
שָׂאִין לָהּ אָדָם שָׂאִין לוֹ שָׁעָה וְאִין לָהּ דָּבָר שָׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם:
a place for it that has not a thing to you and there is not an hour for him who has not a man to you for there is not

This Mishnah teaches that one must never dismiss any person or object, as everything in creation has its designated time and purpose.

משנה ד

מִדַּת הָעֲנָוָה וְחֹמֶר חִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם

Mishna 4 · The Attribute of Humility and the Severity of Desecrating the Divine Name

רַבִּי לְוִיטָס אִישׁ יִבְנֶה אוֹמֵר, מְאֹד מְאֹד הָיִי שָׂפֵל רוּחַ, שִׁתְקוֹת
for the hope of spirit humble of be exceedingly exceedingly says Yavneh a man of Levitas Rabbi
אֲנוֹשׁ רֶמָּה. רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן בְּרוּקָא אוֹמֵר, כָּל הַמַּחֲלֵל שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם
Heaven the Name of profanes whoever says Beroka the son of Yochanan Rabbi the worm man is
בִּסְתֵּר, נִפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ בְּגִלּוּי. אֶחָד שׁוֹגֵג וְאֶחָד מִזִּיד
intentional or whether unintentional whether in public from him they exact punishment in secret
בְּחִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם:
the Name regarding desecration of

This Mishnah teaches the extreme importance of humility and warns of the severe consequences of desecrating Hashem's Name, whether done in secret or openly, intentionally or unintentionally.

משנה ה

לְלַמּוֹד עַל מְנַת לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהָאִסּוּר לְהִנּוֹת מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה

Mishna 5 · Learning in Order to Practice and the Prohibition of Deriving Personal Benefit from the Torah

רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּנוֹ אוֹמֵר, הַלּוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה עַל מְנַת לְלַמֵּד, מְסַפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ
him they enable to teach condition on Torah he who learns says his son Yishmael Rabbi

לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד. וְהַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנַת לַעֲשׂוֹת, מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד
and to teach to learn him they enable to practice condition on and he who learns and to teach to learn
לְשָׁמֵר וּלַעֲשׂוֹת. רַבִּי צָדוֹק אוֹמֵר, אַל תַּעֲשִׂם עֲטָרָה לְהִתְגַּדֵּל בָּהֶם, וְלֹא
and not with them to self-exalt a crown make them do not says Tzadok Rabbi and to practice to safeguard
קִרְדִּים לְחַפֵּר בָּהֶם. וְכֵן הָיָה הֵלֵל אוֹמֵר, וְדֹאשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּתִגָּא, חָלָף. הֵא
behold passes away the crown and he who uses saying Hillel was and so with them to dig a spade
לְמַדָּתְךָ, כָּל הַנִּהְנֶה מִדְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה, נוֹטֵל חַיּוֹ מִן הָעוֹלָם:
the world from his life removes Torah from the words of who derives benefit anyone you have learned

This Mishnah teaches the proper motivations for Torah study and strictly forbids exploiting Torah knowledge for personal gain or self-aggrandizement.

משנה ו

הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמְחַלֵּל אוֹתָהּ

Mishna 6 · The Reward for Honoring the Torah and the Punishment for Dishonoring It

רַבִּי יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר, כָּל הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, גּוֹפּוֹ מְכַבֵּד עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת.
the people by is honored his body the Torah — honors whoever says Yose Rabbi
וְכָל הַמְחַלֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, גּוֹפּוֹ מְחַלֵּל עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת:
the people by is dishonored his body the Torah — dishonors and whoever

Rabbi Yose teaches that one's personal honor among people is a direct reflection of how much honor they show to the Torah.

משנה ז

הַנִּמְנָע מִן הַדִּין וְהַמִּתְנַצֵּחַ בַּהוֹרָאָה

Mishna 7 · Avoiding the Dangers of Judgment and the Arrogance of Ruling

רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּנוֹ אוֹמֵר, הַחוֹשֵׁף עַצְמוֹ מִן הַדִּין, פּוֹרֵק מִמֶּנּוּ אֵיבָה
enmity from himself removes judgment from himself he who spares says his son Yishmael Rabbi
וְגִזְלִים וְשְׁבוּעַת שְׁוֹאָה. וְהַגֵּס לְבוֹ בַּהוֹרָאָה, שׂוֹטֵה רָשָׁע וְגַם
and haughty of wicked is a fool in ruling his heart and he who is haughty falsehood and an oath of and robbery of
רוּחַ:
spirit

Rabbi Yishmael teaches that a judge who avoids unnecessary litigation saves himself from sin, while one who is overconfident in ruling is foolish and arrogant.

משנה ח

הָאֲזַהְרָה מִלְּדוֹן יְחִידִי וּכְפִית הַדַּעַת

Mishna 8 · The Prohibition Against Judging Alone and Forcing One's Opinion

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אַל תְּהִי דֵין יְחִידִי, שְׂאִין דֵין יְחִידִי אֶלָּא אֶחָד.
One except alone who judges for there is none alone judging be do not say used to He
וְאֵל תֹּאמַר קִבְּלוּ דַעְתִּי, שְׂהִן רְשָׁאִין וְלֹא אֶתָּה:
you and not are permitted for they my opinion accept say and do not

This Mishnah warns a judge not to rule single-handedly unless he is a unique expert, and not to force his colleagues to accept his individual ruling.

רבי יונתן אומר, כל המקיים את התורה מעני, סופו לקיימה מעשר.
 from wealth is to fulfill it his end from poverty the Torah — fulfills whoever says Yonasan Rabbi

וכל המבטל את התורה מעשר, סופו לבטלה מעני:
 from poverty is to neglect it his end from wealth the Torah — neglects and whoever

This Mishnah teaches that one who perseveres in Torah study despite financial hardship will eventually merit to study in comfort, while one who neglects it due to material distractions will ultimately lose both.

רבי מאיר אומר, הוי ממצט בעסק, ועסק בתורה. והוי שפל רוח בפני
 before of spirit humble and be in the Torah and engage in business minimizing be says Meir Rabbi

כל אדם. ואם בטלת מן התורה, יש לך בטלים הרבה כנגדך. ואם
 and if against you many neglectors to you there are the Torah from you neglected and if men all

עמלת בתורה, יש לו שכר הרבה לתן לך:
 to you to give much reward to Him there is in the Torah you labored

Rabbi Meir teaches the importance of prioritizing Torah study over business, maintaining humility, and the consequences of neglecting or laboring in Torah.

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר, העושה מצוה אחת, קונה לו פרקליט
 advocate for himself acquires one mitzvah one who performs says Yaakov son of Eliezer Rabbi

אחד. והעובר עברה אחת, קונה לו קטגור אחד. תשובה
 repentance one accuser for himself acquires one transgression and one who commits one

ומעשים טובים, כתרס בפני הפרענות. רבי יוחנן הסנדלר אומר, כל
 every says the Shoemaker Yochanan Rabbi the punishment before are like a shield good and deeds

כנסיה שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים. ושאינה לשם שמים, אין
 not Heaven for the sake of and that is not is to endure its end Heaven for the sake of that is assembly

סופה להתקיים:
 is to endure its end

This Mishnah teaches that every mitzvah creates a defending angel while every sin creates an accuser, and that only gatherings dedicated to Heaven will endure.

כבוד התלמיד ומורא הרב

Mishna 12 · The Honor of a Student and the Reverence for a Teacher

רבי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שָׁמוּעַ אוֹמֵר, יְהִי כְבוֹד תַּלְמִידָךְ חֵבִיב עֲלֶיךָ כְּשֻׁלְךָ,

as your own to you dear your student the honor of let be says Shammua ben Elazar Rabbi

וְכָבוֹד חֲבֵרָךְ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ, וּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ כְּמוֹרָא

like the reverence of your teacher and the reverence of your teacher like the reverence of your colleague and the honor of

שָׁמַיִם:

Heaven

This Mishnah outlines the proper hierarchy of respect and reverence one must maintain toward students, colleagues, and Torah teachers.

משנה יג

הזהירות בתלמוד ומעלת פתח שם טוב

Mishna 13 · Carefulness in Torah Study and the Greatness of a Good Name

רבי יהודה אוֹמֵר, הָיִי זָהִיר בְּתַלְמוּד, שִׁשְׁגָּגַת תַּלְמוּד עוֹלָה זָדוֹן. רַבִּי

Rabbi deliberate sin is considered study for an error of in study careful be says Yehudah Rabbi

שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, שְׁלֹשָׁה כְּתָרִים הֵם, כֶּתֶר תּוֹרָה וְכֶתֶר כֹּהֵנָה

priesthood and the crown of Torah the crown of there are crowns three says Shimon

וְכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת, וְכֶתֶר שֵׁם טוֹב עוֹלָה עַל גִּבְיָהֶן:

them above rises good a name but the crown of royalty and the crown of

This Mishnah warns that errors in Torah study due to carelessness are judged as intentional sins, and teaches that a good reputation surpasses the crowns of Torah, priesthood, and royalty.

משנה יד

הגליה למקום תורה ואיסור הסתמכות על ההבנה העצמית

Mishna 14 · Exiling Oneself to a Place of Torah and Not Relying on One's Own Understanding

רבי נהוראי אוֹמֵר, הָיִי גוֹלָה לְמָקוֹם תּוֹרָה, וְאַל תֵּאמַר שֶׁהִיא תָּבֵא

will come that it say and do not Torah to a place of exiling be says Nehorai Rabbi

אַחֲרֶיהָ, שֶׁחֲבֵרֶיהָ יִקְיְמוּהָ בְּיָדָךְ. וְאַל בִּינָתָךְ אֵל תִּשָּׁעוּן

rely do not your understanding and to in your hand will make it permanent for your colleagues after you

משלי ג :

3 Proverbs

Rabbi Nehorai teaches that one must actively seek out a place of Torah study rather than expecting the Torah to come to him.

משנה טו

שלות הרשעים ופניהם האדם עם חבירו

Mishna 15 · The Peace of the Wicked and Proper Conduct with Others

רבי ינאי אוֹמֵר, אֵין בְּיָדֵינוּ לֹא מִשְׁלֹת הָרָשָׁעִים וְאַף לֹא

not and even the wicked from the peace of neither in our hands there is not says Yannai Rabbi

מִיִּסּוּרֵי הַצְּדִיקִים. רַבִּי מַתְיָא בֶּן חֲרָשׁ אוֹמֵר, הָיִי מְקַדִּים בְּשָׁלוֹם

with the greeting of initiating be says Charash son of Matya Rabbi the righteous from the afflictions of

כָּל אָדָם. וְהָיָה זָנֹב לְאַרְיֹת, וְאֵל תְּהִי רֹאשׁ לְשׁוּעָלִים:

to the foxes a head be and do not to the lions a tail and be man every

Rabbi Yannai teaches that we cannot comprehend the prosperity of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous, while Rabbi Matya ben Charash advises on humility and greeting others.

משנה טז

הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה כְּפָרוּזְדוֹר לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא

Mishna 16 · This World as a Vestibule Before the World to Come

רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב אוֹמֵר, הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דּוֹמֶה לְפָרוּזְדוֹר בְּפָנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. הֵתִקֵּן

prepare the coming the world before to a vestibule is comparable this the world says Yaakov Rabbi

עֲצָמָהּ בְּפָרוּזְדוֹר, כְּדִי שִׁתְּכַנֵּס לְטָרְקֵלֶיךָ:

the banqueting hall that you may enter in order in the vestibule yourself

Rabbi Yaakov teaches that one must prepare spiritually in this world to merit the rewards of the World to Come.

משנה יז

יִחוד הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהָעוֹלָם הַבָּא

Mishna 17 · The Unique Value of This World and the World to Come

הוּא הֵיךְ אוֹמֵר, יִפָּה שָׁעָה אַחַת בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה,

this in the world good and deeds in repentance one hour better is say used to He

מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְיִפָּה שָׁעָה אַחַת שֶׁל קוֹרַת רוּחַ בְּעוֹלָם

in the world of spirit satisfaction of one hour and better is the coming the world the life of than all

הַבָּא, מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה:

this the world the life of than all the coming

This Mishnah contrasts the spiritual opportunities of this world with the ultimate reward of the World to Come.

משנה יח

הַנְּהִיגָה רְאוּיָה עִם הַחֵבֶר בְּשַׁעַת צָעֲרוֹ וְכַעֲסוֹ

Mishna 18 · Proper Conduct with a Friend in Times of Anger and Grief

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר, אֵל תִּרְצֶה אֶת חֵבֶרְךָ בְּשַׁעַת כַּעֲסוֹ, וְאֵל

and do not his anger at the time of your friend — appease do not says Elazar son of Shimon Rabbi

תִּנְחַמְנֵהוּ בְּשַׁעַת שְׁמִתּוֹ מִטֵּל לִפְנָיו, וְאֵל תִּשְׁאַל לוֹ בְּשַׁעַת נִדְרוֹ,

his vow at the time of him question and do not before him lies that his dead at the hour comfort him

וְאֵל תִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לִרְאוּתוֹ בְּשַׁעַת קִלְקָלְתּוֹ:

his disgrace at the time of to see him strive and do not

This Mishnah teaches the psychological sensitivity required when interacting with a friend who is experiencing intense anger, grief, or embarrassment.

משנה יט

הִיאָהֳרָה מִלְּשִׂמַּח בְּמַפְלַת הָאוֹיֵב

Mishna 19 · The Prohibition Against Rejoicing at the Downfall of One's Enemy

שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן אוֹמֵר, מִשְׁלִי כִּד בְּנִפְל אוֹיְבְּךָ אֵל תִּשְׂמַח וּבִכְשָׁלּוֹ

and in his stumbling rejoice do not your enemy In the falling of 24 Proverbs says the Small Shmuel

אל יגל לבד, פון יראה ה' ורע בעיניו והשיב מעליו
from upon him and He will turn back in His eyes and it will be evil Hashem He will see lest your heart let exult do not

אפו:
His anger

Shmuel Hakatan would constantly repeat this verse from Proverbs to warn against feeling joy when an enemy stumbles.

משנה כ

הלומד בילדות ובזקנה והסתכלות בתוכן ולא בקנקן

Mishna 20 · Learning in Youth Versus Old Age and Looking at the Substance Rather Than the Vessel

אלישע בן אבויה אומר, הלומד ילד למה הוא דומה, לדיו כתובה על
upon written to ink compared is he to what as a child one who learns says Avuyah son of Elisha
ניר חדש. והלומד זקן למה הוא דומה, לדיו כתובה על ניר
paper upon written to ink compared is he to what as an old man and one who learns new paper
מחוק. רבי יוסי בר יהודה איש כפר הבבלי אומר, הלומד מן הקטנים
the young from one who learns says Habavli Kfar a man of Yehudah son of Yose Rabbi erased
למה הוא דומה, לאכל ענבים קהות ושותה יין מגתו. והלומד מן
from and one who learns from his press wine and drinks unripe grapes to one who eats compared is he to what
הזקנים למה הוא דומה, לאכל ענבים בשלות ושותה יין ישן. רבי
Rabbi old wine and drinks ripe grapes to one who eats compared is he to what the old
אומר, אל תסתכל בקנקן, אלא במה שיש בו. יש קנקן חדש מלא
full of new a flask there is in it that there is at what but at the flask look do not says
ישן, וישן שאפלו חדש אין בו:
in it there is not new that even and an old old

This Mishnah contrasts learning in youth with learning in old age, and cautions that wisdom is measured by inner substance rather than external appearance.

משנה כא

הקנאה והתאווה והפכוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם

Mishna 21 · Envy Lust and Honor Remove a Person from the World

רבי אלעזר הקפר אומר, הקנאה והתאווה והפכוד, מוציאים את האדם מן
from man — remove and honor and lust envy says HaKappar Elazar Rabbi
העולם:
the world

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar warns that destructive character traits can shorten a person's life and ruin their spiritual existence.

משנה כב

הדין והתשובה לפני מלך מלכי המלכים

Mishna 22 · The Ultimate Judgment and Reckoning Before the King of Kings

הוא היה אומר, הילודים למות, והמתים להחיות, והחיים לדון.
are to be judged and the living are to be resurrected and the dead are to die the ones born say used to He

לִידַע לְהוֹדִיעַ וּלְהִנָּדַע שֶׁהוּא אֵל, הוּא הַיּוֹצֵר, הוּא הַבּוֹרֵא, הוּא

He the Creator He the Fashioner He God that He and to become aware to make known to know

הַמִּבִּין, הוּא הַדִּין, הוּא עֵד, הוּא בֹּעַל דִּין, וְהוּא עֲתִיד לָדוֹן. בָּרוּךְ

blessed to judge is destined and He judgment Master of He witness He the Judge He the Discerner

הוּא, שְׂאִין לְפָנָיו לֹא עוֹלָה, וְלֹא שִׁכְחָה, וְלֹא מִשּׁוּא פָּנִים, וְלֹא

nor . favoritism nor forgetfulness nor iniquity neither before Him for there is not is He

מִקַּח שֹׁחַד, שֶׁהַכֹּל שָׁלוֹ. וְדַע שֶׁהַכֹּל לְפִי הַחֲשָׁבוֹן. וְאֵל

and let not the reckoning is according to that everything and know is His for everything bribery taking of

יְבַטִּיחָהּ יִצְרָה שֶׁהַשְּׂאוֹל בֵּית מָנוֹס לָהּ, שֶׁעַל כָּרְחָה אֶתָּה נוֹצֵר,

were formed you your will for against for you refuge is a place of that the grave your evil inclination assure you

וְעַל כָּרְחָה אֶתָּה נוֹלָד, וְעַל כָּרְחָה אֶתָּה חַי, וְעַל כָּרְחָה אֶתָּה מֵת,

die you your will and against live you your will and against were born you your will and against

וְעַל כָּרְחָה אֶתָּה עֲתִיד לָתֵן דִּין וְחֲשָׁבוֹן לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי

kings of the King of before and reckoning judgment to give are destined you your will and against

הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא:

is He blessed the Holy One the kings

This Mishnah teaches that every person is held accountable for their actions and will ultimately stand in judgment before the Creator, Who is entirely just and all-knowing.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter flows through a series of essential teachings on personal conduct, Torah study, and the ultimate purpose of our lives. It emphasizes the great value of humility, warning us to be exceedingly humble and to avoid arrogance in judgment. We are taught about the spiritual reality of our actions, where every mitzvah creates a defending advocate and every sin creates an accuser, and we learn about the supreme value of a good name above all other crowns. Finally, the Sages prepare us for the future by comparing this world to a vestibule where we must prepare ourselves through repentance and good deeds, reminding us that while one hour of spiritual growth in this world is more precious than all of the World to Come, the tranquility of the World to Come surpasses all the pleasures of this world.

My dear talmid, look at the beautiful words of Rabbi Jacob in our Mishnah: "This world is like a vestibule before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the vestibule, so that you may enter the banqueting-hall." He then adds a staggering chiddush: "More precious is one hour in repentance and good deeds in this world, than all the life of the World to Come."

Think about what the Tanna is telling us here. The World to Come is a place of ultimate reward, a spiritual pleasure so great that one hour of its tranquility is greater than all of this world combined. Yet, Hashem created a reality where this physical world has something even the highest heavens cannot touch. In the World to Come, we can no longer grow, change, or choose. Only here, in this physical "vestibule," can a Yid do teshuvah, perform a mitzvah, and bring pleasure to Hashem.

Sometimes we look at our daily struggles, our parnassah worries, and our spiritual ups and downs, and we wish we could just escape to a place of pure spirituality. But the Mishnah is reminding us of the immense value of our time right now. Every single moment in this world is an irreplaceable treasure. One small mitzvah, one moment of overcoming a temptation, or one heartfelt word of tefillah is worth more than eternity because it is something you can only accomplish right here, in the dust of this world.

Today, when you feel rushed or overwhelmed, stop for just one minute and realize the preciousness of the moment. Do one small, deliberate act of teshuvah or a single mitzvah, like saying a brachah slowly with kavanah or giving a coin to tzedakah, with the conscious joy that you are doing something that even the angels in Heaven cannot do.