

מִסְכֵּת אָבוֹת • פֶּרֶק רְבִיעִי

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

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, 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

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

בֶּן זֹמָא אוֹמֵר,

Ben Zoma says:

אִיזְהוּ חָכָם,

Who is truly wise?

הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם,

He who learns from every man, even from those who are younger or less scholarly than himself,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר תְּהִלִּים קִיט מִכָּל מְלַמְדֵי הַשִּׁכְלָתִי כִּי עֲדוֹתֶיהָ שִׁיחָה לִּי.

as it is said in the book of Tehillim: "From all my teachers I gained wisdom, for Your testimonies are a discussion to me."

אִיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר,

Who is truly mighty?

הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ,

He who subdues and conquers his evil inclination,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלִי טוֹב אֶרֶךְ אַפִּים מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשָּׁל בְּרוּחוֹ מִלֵּכַד עִיר.

as it is said in the book of Mishlei: "Better is one slow to anger than a mighty man, and one who rules his spirit than one who captures a city."

אִיזָהוּ עָשִׁיר,

Who is truly rich?

הַשֵּׂמֵחַ בְּחֶלְקוֹ,

He who rejoices in his portion, being content with whatever Hashem has granted him,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר תְּהִלִּים קִכָּח יִגִּיעַ פִּפְיֶךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ.

as it is said in Tehillim: "The labor of your hands when you eat, praiseworthy are you and it is good for you."

אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ, בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

This means: "Praiseworthy are you" refers to your life in this world,

וְטוֹב לָךְ, לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

"and it is good for you" refers to your reward in the world to come.

אִיזָהוּ מְכַבֵּד,

Who is truly honored?

הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת,

He who honors the creations, showing respect to every human being created in the image of Hashem,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שְׁמוּאֵל א ב כִּי מְכַבְּדִי אֶכְבֵּד וּבְזִי יִקְלָו:

as it is said in the book of Shmuel: "For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be degraded."

מִשְׁנָה ב

Mishna 2· Alacrity in Performing Mitzvos and Fleeing from Transgression

בֶּן עֲזַאי אוֹמֵר,

Ben Azzai says:

הָיִי רָץ לְמִצְוָה קְלָה כְּבִתְמוּרָה,

Be running to a seemingly light mitzvah with the same enthusiasm as to a grave and major one,

וּבֹרַח מִן הַעֲבֵרָה.

and be fleeing from even the slightest transgression.

שֶׁמִּצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה,

For performing one mitzvah drags and leads to another mitzvah,

וְעִבְרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבֵרָה.

and committing one **transgression drags** and leads to another **transgression**.

שְׂשֻׁכָּר מִצְוָה, מִצְוָה.

For the ultimate **reward of a mitzvah** is the opportunity to perform another **mitzvah**,

וְשֻׁכָּר עֲבֵרָה, עֲבֵרָה:

and the spiritual **reward of a transgression** is that it drags a person into another **transgression**.

מִשְׁנָה ג

Mishna 3 · Valuing Every Person and Every Thing

הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר,

He, Ben Azzai, **used to say**:

אַל תְּהִי בּוֹ לְכָל אָדָם,

Do not be despising of any **man**, no matter how lowly he may seem,

וְאַל תְּהִי מִפְּלִיג לְכָל דָּבָר,

and do not be **excluding** or pushing away **any thing** as being completely useless,

שָׂאִין לָהּ אָדָם שָׂאִין לוֹ שְׁעָה

for there is **not for you a man who has not** a designated **hour for him** to rise and succeed,

וְאִין לָהּ דָּבָר שָׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם:

and there is **not for you a thing that has not for it a place** where it is needed and has its purpose.

מִשְׁנָה ד

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

רַבִּי לֵוִיטָס אִישׁ יָבֵנָה אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Levitas, a man of Yavneh, **says**:

מְאֹד מְאֹד הָיוּ שְׂפַל רוּחַ,

Exceedingly, exceedingly, be humble of spirit,

שֶׁתְּקִנֹּת אֲנוּשׁ רָמָה.

for the **hope of man** is the **worm** in the grave.

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן בְּרוּקָא אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yochanan, the son of Beroka, says:

כָּל הַמְחַלֵּל שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם בְּסֵתֶר,

Whoever profanes the Name of Heaven in secret,

נִכְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ בְּגָלוּי.

they exact punishment from him in public.

אֶחָד שׁוֹגֵג וְאֶחָד מְזִיד בְּחִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם:

It is **the same** whether it was **unintentional** or whether it was **intentional** regarding desecration of the Name.

משנה ה

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

רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yishmael, his son, says:

הַלּוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה עַל מְנַת לְלַמֵּד,

He who learns Torah on condition to teach others,

מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד.

Heaven enables him to learn and to teach.

וְהַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנַת לַעֲשׂוֹת,

And he who learns on condition to practice and fulfill the mitzvos,

מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד לְשָׁמֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת.

Heaven enables him to learn, and to teach, to safeguard, and to practice.

רַבִּי צְדוֹק אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Tzadok says:

אַל תַּעֲשֶׂם עֲטָרָה לְהִתְגַּדֵּל בָּהֶם,

Do not make them, the words of Torah, a crown to self-exalt with them,

וְלֹא קַרְדֶּם לְחַפֵּר בָּהֶם.

and not a spade to dig with them for your livelihood.

וְכֵן הָיָה הָלֵל אוֹמֵר,

And so was Hillel saying:

וידאשתמש בתגא, קלה.

And he who uses the crown of Torah for personal gain passes away from the world.

הא למדת,

Behold, you have learned from this:

כל הנהנה מדברי תורה,

anyone who derives personal benefit from the words of Torah,

נוטל חייו מן העולם:

removes his life from the world.

משנה ו

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

רבי יוסי אומר,

Rabbi Yose says:

כל המכבד את התורה,

Whoever honors the Torah by treating its holy words and those who study it with proper respect,

גופו מכבד על הבריות.

his body, meaning his own person, is honored by the people.

וכל המחלל את התורה,

And whoever dishonors the Torah by treating it or its mitzvos with disrespect,

גופו מחלל על הבריות:

his body, his own person, is dishonored by the people.

משנה ז

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

רבי ישמעאל בנו אומר,

Rabbi Yishmael, his son, says:

החושף עצמו מן הדין,

One who spares himself from serving as a judge in judgment

פורק ממנו איבה וגזל ושבועת שוא.

removes from himself enmity, and the risk of committing robbery by ruling incorrectly, and the cause of a false oath being taken by the litigants.

וְהָגַס לְבּוֹ בְּהוֹרָאָה,

And one who is haughty of heart in issuing a halachic ruling, rushing to decide without proper deliberation,

שׁוֹטָה רָשָׁע וְגַס רוּחַ:

such a person is a fool, wicked, and haughty of spirit.

מִשְׁנָה ח

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

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר,

He, Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yose, used to say:

אַל תְּהִי דָן יְחִידִי,

Do not be judging alone as a single judge,

שָׂאִין דָּן יְחִידִי אֶלָּא אֶחָד.

for there is none who judges alone except One, Who is Hashem, the Master of the world.

וְאַל תֹּאמַר קִבְּלוּ דַעְתִּי,

And do not say to your fellow judges, "Accept my opinion" and rule like me,

שֶׁהֵן רִשְׁאִין וְלֹא אֶתָּה:

for they, the majority, are permitted to decide the halacha according to their view, and not you, who are in the minority, are permitted to force them.

מִשְׁנָה ט

Mishna 9 · Fulfilling the Torah in Poverty and Neglecting It in Wealth

רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yonasan says:

כָּל הַמְּקַיֵּם אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מֵעֲנִי,

Whoever fulfills the Torah from a state of poverty, pushing through his financial struggles to learn and keep the mitzvos,

סוֹפּוֹ לְקַיְּמָה מֵעֶשֶׂר.

his end is to fulfill it from wealth, as Hashem will bless him with prosperity so he can serve Him with ease.

וְכָל הַמְּבַטֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מֵעֶשֶׂר,

And whoever neglects the Torah from wealth, being too distracted by his riches and business to learn,

סופו לִבְטֹלָה מֵעֵנִי:

his end is to neglect it from poverty, as he will lose his fortune and be too preoccupied with his struggles to find sustenance.

משנה י

Mishna 10 · Minimizing Business for Torah Study and Humility Before All Men

רבי מאיר אומר,

Rabbi Meir says:

הוי ממצט בעסק,

Be minimizing in business dealings, so that you do not make your livelihood your primary focus,

ועסק בתורה.

and engage in the Torah as your main occupation.

והוי שפל רוח בפני כל אדם.

And be humble of spirit before all men, recognizing the value in every single person.

ואם בטלת מן התורה,

And if you neglected from the Torah, choosing to waste your time on empty matters,

יש לה בטלים הרבה כנגדה.

there are to you neglectors many against you—many distractions and obstacles will arise to keep you from it.

ואם עמלת בתורה,

And if you labored in the Torah with dedication and effort,

יש לו שכר הרבה לתן לה:

there is to Him—to Hashem—reward much to give to you in the World to Come.

משנה יא

Mishna 11 · Acquiring Advocates Through Mitzvos and Assemblies for the Sake of Heaven

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר,

Rabbi Eliezer son of Yaakov says:

העושה מצוה אחת,

One who performs even one mitzvah,

קוֹנֵה לוֹ פֶּרֶקְלִיט אֶחָד.

acquires for himself one advocate in Heaven to defend him.

וְהַעֲוֵר עֲבֵרָה אַחַת,

And one who commits even one transgression,

קוֹנֵה לוֹ מַטְגּוֹר אֶחָד.

acquires for himself one accuser to prosecute him.

תְּשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים,

But repentance and good deeds

כְּתָרִים בְּפָנֵי הַפְּרָעוֹת.

are like a shield before the punishment, protecting a person from bad decrees.

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן הַסַּנְדֵּלָר אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yochanan the Shoemaker says:

כָּל כְּנִסְיָה שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,

Every assembly that is for the sake of Heaven, gathered with pure intentions for Hashem's honor,

סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם.

its end is to endure and have a lasting impact.

וְשֵׁינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,

And any assembly that is not for the sake of Heaven,

אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם:

its end is not to endure, and it will eventually fall apart.

מִשְׁנֵה יב

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

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שָׁמוּעַ אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua says:

יְהִי כְבוֹד תַּלְמִידָה חֲבִיב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלָּךְ,

Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own honor,

וּכְבוֹד חֲבֵרָךְ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ,

and the honor of your colleague should be treated with the same weight like the reverence of your teacher,

ומורא רבך כמורא שמים:

and the reverence of your teacher must be held in awe like the reverence of Heaven.

משנה יג

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

רבי יהודה אומר,

Rabbi Yehudah says to his students:

הוי זהיר בתלמוד,

Be careful in study, to review your learning and understand it properly,

ששגגת תלמוד עולה זדון.

for an error of study, where one rules incorrectly because he did not review, is considered like a deliberate sin.

רבי שמעון אומר,

Rabbi Shimon says:

שלושה כתרין הם,

Three crowns there are which were given to Klal Yisrael:

כתר תורה

the crown of Torah,

וכתר כהונה

and the crown of priesthood,

וכתר מלכות,

and the crown of royalty;

וכתר שם טוב

but the crown of a good name, which a person acquires through his fine character and good deeds,

עולה על גביהן:

rises above them all, as it is the foundation for all the other crowns.

רַבִּי נְהוֹרַאי אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Nehorai says:

הָיִי גוֹלָה לְמָקוֹם תּוֹרָה,

Be constantly **exiling** yourself **to a place of Torah** to learn from great talmidei chachamim,

וְאַל תֹּאמַר שֶׁהִיא תָּבֵא אֶחָרָה,

and do not say that it, the Torah, **will come after you** to your own town where there are no teachers,

שֶׁחֲבֵרֶיהָ יִקְיְמוּהָ בְּיָדָהּ.

for it is only through the sharp discussions with **your colleagues** that **they will make it permanent in your hand** so that you do not forget your learning.

וְאַל בִּינְתָה אֶל תִּשְׁעוֹן

And as the pasuk says, "**to your own understanding do not rely**"

מִשְׁלֵי ג

in **Mishlei** chapter 3, but rather seek the guidance of the Sages.

רַבִּי יַנָּאי אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yannai says,

אֵין בְּיָדֵינוּ

it is **not in our hands**—we do not possess the understanding to explain—

לֹא מִשְׁלֵי הַרְשָׁעִים

neither the reason **from the peace of the wicked**,

וְאֵף לֹא מִסּוּרֵי הַצְדִּיקִים.

and even not the reason **from the afflictions of the righteous** in this world.

רַבִּי מַתְיָא בֶּן חֲרָשׁ אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Matya son of Charash says,

הָיִי מְקַדִּים בְּשָׁלוֹם כָּל אָדָם.

be initiating with the greeting of every man, even a non-Jew in the marketplace.

וְהָיִי זָנָב לְאֲרִיּוֹת,

And be a tail to the lions, associating with those greater than you so you may learn from them,

וְאַל תְּהִי רֹאשׁ לְשׁוּעָלִים:

and do not be a head to the foxes, leading those who are inferior to you.

מִשְׁנָה טז

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

רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב אָמַר,

Rabbi Yaakov says a beautiful mashal about our purpose in this life:

הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דּוֹמֶה לְפָרוּזְדוֹר

This world is comparable to a vestibule, an entryway,

בְּפָנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

before the World to Come, which is the main home.

הַתָּקֵן עֲצֻמָּה בְּפָרוּזְדוֹר,

Therefore, prepare yourself in the vestibule by doing mitzvos and learning Torah in this world,

כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּכְנַס לְטָרְקֵלִין:

in order that you may enter the banqueting hall of the World to Come, clean and ready to enjoy the light of the Shechinah.

מִשְׁנָה יז

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

הוּא הִזָּה אָמַר,

He, Rabbi Yaakov, used to say:

יֵפֶה שָׁעָה אַחַת בְּתַשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה,

Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world

מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

than all the life of the World to Come, because only in this physical world can a person actively serve Hashem and elevate his neshama.

וְיֵפֶה שָׁעָה אַחַת שֶׁל קוֹרֶת רוּחַ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא,

And yet, **better is one hour of satisfaction of spirit in the World to Come**, basking in the spiritual radiance of the Shechinah,

מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה:

than all the physical pleasures and life of this world.

מִשְׁנֵה יח

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

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Shimon the son of Elazar says:

אַל תִּרְצֶה אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ בְּשַׁעַת כַּעֲסוֹ,

Do not appease your friend at the time of his anger, because when his blood is boiling he cannot hear you and your words will only upset him more;

וְאַל תִּנְחַמְנוּ בְּשַׁעַת שְׁמִיתוֹ מִטָּל לְפָנָיו,

and do not comfort him at the hour that his dead relative lies before him, for his grief is too fresh and intense to accept comfort;

וְאַל תִּשְׁאַל לוֹ בְּשַׁעַת נִדְרוֹ,

and do not question him to seek a loophole at the time of his vow, as he is still acting out of anger and may make a worse vow;

וְאַל תִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לִרְאוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁעַת קִלְקָלָתוֹ:

and do not strive to see him at the time of his disgrace, so that he does not feel embarrassed in your presence.

מִשְׁנֵה יט

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

שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן אוֹמֵר,

Shmuel HaKatan says, quoting the verse in

משלי כד

Mishlei, chapter 24:

בְּנִפֹּל אוֹיְבְּךָ אַל תִּשְׂמַח

“When your enemy falls, do not rejoice,

וּבִכְשָׁלוֹ אַל יִגַּל לִבְּךָ,

and when he stumbles, let your heart not exult,

כִּן יֵרָאֶה ה'

lest Hashem see it,

וְרַע בְּעֵינָיו

and it be evil in His eyes,

וְהָשִׁיב מַעַלְיוֹ אָפוֹ:

and He turn back His anger from upon him, and direct it toward you instead.”

מִשְׁנָה כ

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

אֶלִישָׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אוֹמֵר,

Elisha son of Avuyah says:

הַלּוֹמֵד יְלָד לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה,

One who learns Torah as a child, to what is he compared?

לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נִיר חֲדָשׁ.

To ink written upon new paper, which absorbs the ink cleanly and retains it perfectly.

וְהַלּוֹמֵד זָקֵן לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה,

And one who learns Torah as an old man, to what is he compared?

לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נִיר מְחֻקָּה.

To ink written upon erased paper, where the writing is not as clear and is easily smudged.

רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶר יְהוּדָה אִישׁ כְּפַר הַבְּבֵלִי אוֹמֵר,

Rabbi Yose son of Yehudah, a man of Kfar Habavli, says:

הַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַקְטָנִים לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה,

One who learns Torah from the young teachers, to what is he compared?

לְאֹכַל עֲנָבִים קָהוּת וְשׁוֹתָהּ יַיִן מְגֵתוֹ.

To one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his press, which are sour and not yet fully processed.

וְהַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַזְקֵנִים לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה,

And one who learns Torah from the old and experienced sages, to what is he compared?

לְאֹכַל עֲנָבִים בְּשָׁלוּת וְשׁוֹתָהּ יַיִן יָשׁוּן.

To one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine, which are sweet, refined, and settled.

רבי אומר, אל תסתכל בקנקן, אלא במה שיש בו.

Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi says: Do not look at the flask, but rather at what is in it.

יש קנקן חדש מלא יין,

There is a new flask—a young student—who is full of old wine, meaning he possesses deep, mature wisdom;

ויין שאפילו חדש אין בו:

and there is an old flask that even new wine is not in it, meaning an elder who has not acquired even basic wisdom.

משנה כא

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

רבי אלעזר הקפרי אומר,

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says to us as a powerful lesson for our avodah:

הקנאה והתאווה והכבוד,

envy of what others have, and physical lust, and the pursuit of honor and prestige,

מוציאין את האדם מן העולם:

remove a man from the world, destroying his spiritual life and his peace of mind in this world, and costing him his portion in the World to Come.

משנה כב

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

הוא היה אומר,

He used to say:

הילודים למות,

the ones born are destined to die,

והמתים לתחיית,

and the dead are destined to be resurrected,

והחיים לדון.

and the living are destined to be judged.

לידע ולהודיע ולהודע

This is to know, to make known, and to become aware

שהוא אל,

that He is God;

הוא הַיוֹצֵר,

He is the Fashioner,

הוא הַבּוֹרֵא,

He is the Creator,

הוא הַמַּבִּין,

He is the Discerner,

הוא הַדִּין,

He is the Judge,

הוא עֵד,

He is the witness,

הוא בַּעַל דִּין,

He is the Master of judgment,

וְהוא עֲתִיד לְדוֹן.

and He is destined to judge,

בָּרוּךְ הוּא,

blessed is He;

שֶׁאֵין לְפָנָיו

for there is not before Him

לֹא עוֹלָה,

neither iniquity,

וְלֹא שִׁכְחָה,

nor forgetfulness,

וְלֹא מִשּׁוֹא פָּנִים,

nor favoritism,

וְלֹא מִקַּח שֹׁחַד,

nor taking of bribery,

שְׁהַכֵּל שְׁלוֹ.

for everything is His.

וְדַע שְׁהַכֵּל לְפִי הַחֲשָׁבוֹן.

And know that everything is according to the reckoning.

וְאַל יַבְטִיחַ יִצְרָךְ

And let not assure you your evil inclination

שֶׁהַשְּׂאוֹל בֵּית מְנוּס לָּךְ,

that the grave is a place of refuge for you;

שֶׁעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה נֻצָּר,

for against your will you were formed,

וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה נֻלָּד,

and against your will you were born,

וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה חַי,

and against your will you live,

וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה מֵת,

and against your will you die,

וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה עֹתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֲשָׁבוֹן

and against your will you are destined to give judgment and reckoning

לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא:

before the King of kings of the kings, the Holy One, blessed is He.

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.