

ב"ה

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IN MEMORY OF BORUCH BEN YITZCHOK
BORUCH



משנה
בשמה For

MISHNA For NESHAMA



אבות דא

בן זומא אומר: איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר: מכל מלמדי השכלתי, כי עדותיך שיחה לי. איזהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר: טוב ארך אפים מגבור, ומושל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזהו עשיר, השליח בחלקו, שנאמר: יגיע כפיך כי תאכל, אשריך וטוב לך, אשריך בעולם הזה, וטוב לך לעולם הבא. איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר: כי מכבדי אכבד ובני יקלנו.

Ethics of the Fathers 4:1

Ben Zoma would say: Who is wise? One who learns from every person, as is stated: “From all who taught me I have gained wisdom, for Your testimonials are my meditation.” Who is mighty? One who subdues his [evil] inclination, as is stated: “One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and one who rules his spirit is better than one who conquers a city.” Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot, as is stated: “When you eat from the labor of your hands, fortunate are you and it is good for you.” “Fortunate are you” in this world, and “it will be good for you” in the World to Come. Who is honored? One who honors his fellows, as is stated: “For I honor those who honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be demeaned.”

Insights

Ethics of the Fathers presents us with a series of ethical principles articulated by the Sages whose Halachic opinions appear elsewhere in the Mishnah. It is concerned with down-to-earth, hands-on, practical living – like a self-help book.

Ben Zoma, “son of Zoma”, was not called by his own name, Shimon, because he died at a young age and never received rabbinic ordination.

‘Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot’ Many studies have shown a strong link between extreme wealth and depression. Wealthier children tend to be more distressed than lower-income kids and have a higher risk of anxiety and depression. There are many theories why this is so. The Torah offers two amazing statements that shed light on this issue. The first states, “One who has \$100 wants \$200, one who has \$200 wants \$400.” The wealthier we are, the more we want and think we need. The second is the

statement of Ben Zoma in our Mishnah, “Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot.”

We all would love to be wealthy and happy simultaneously. We can achieve this by developing and working on the very important quality trait of contentment and be able to say, “I have everything I truly need.”

Perhaps another opinion of defining wealth is illustrated in the following story.

Sir Moses Montefiore was one of the great figures of Victorian Britain. Someone once asked him: “Sir Moses, what are you worth?” He thought for a while and named a figure.

“But surely,” said his questioner, “your wealth must be much more than that.”

With a smile, Sir Moses replied: “You didn’t ask me how much I own. You asked me how much I am worth. So, I calculated how much I have given to charity thus far this year – because we are worth what we are willing to share with others.”

ב

Bet

is the second letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of ‘two’. The meaning of bet is bayit, which is Hebrew for ‘home’. Every human being is a composite of body and soul. When a person passes away, the body is interned in the ground while the soul, which is everlasting, returns home to G-d. We should find comfort knowing that the soul of our loved one has returned home and has been reunited with G-d.



אבות ב,א

רַבִּי אומר: איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבר לו האדם? כל שהיא תפארת לעושה ותפארת לו מן האדם. והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה. והסתכל בשלשה דברים, ואי אתה בא לידי עברה; דע מה למעלה ממך: עין רואה, ואזן שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין.

Avot 2:1

Rebbi would say: Which is the proper course for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it and harmonious for humanity. And be careful with a minor commandment as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards for fulfilling commandments. Consider the loss through fulfilling a commandment against its reward and the gain of a transgression against its loss. Contemplate three things and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are inscribed in a book.



Reish

is the twentieth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'two hundred'. Reish means 'poverty'. It's interesting to note that, in the Talmudic era, a person who had less than 200 coins was considered below the poverty level and was entitled to receive tzedakah from the synagogue. The Sages teach us that in G-d's eyes, tzedakah and acts of kindness are equivalent to all the mitzvot of the Torah. Elsewhere they write, "Great is tzedakah, for since the world was created until this day the world exits upon tzedakah". It has always been the custom that every Jewish home should have a tzedakah pushka (a charity box).

Insights

Ethics of the Fathers is the only section of the Mishna devoted exclusively to the ethical and moral statements of the Sages. It contains timeless wisdom and advice.

Our Mishnah shares the wisdom of Rebbi, Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. His contemporaries called him 'our Holy Teacher', and he attained the ultimate level of wisdom and greatness. He was responsible for committing the Oral Tradition to a text known as the Mishna thereby preserving Jewish law for all time.

There are approximately 7.9 billion people who populate the planet Earth. The world has existed for over 5780 years. Who knows how many humans have lived since the time of Adam and Chava. Our time here is transient even if we live till 120. We may begin to question our very existence. Do we really make a difference? Or posed slightly different, would the world be any different if we were never born?

This is a very sobering thought.

The Baal Shem Tov (1698 - 1760), the founder of the Chassidic movement who stressed the importance of serving G-d with joy and happiness, offers a unique insight into the phrase 'Know what is above you'. He writes that everything we say and do has an impact in heaven. If we act in a benevolent and kindly fashion to our fellow human beings, G-d's attribute of compassion will be revealed through the supernal worlds.

The phrase reads, know that what occurs above in the celestial worlds is from you.

The next time we are feeling down, remember that we do count; our actions do make a difference. And what we do down here on earth impacts all the way up to the upper spiritual worlds.



מועד קטן ג,א

וְאֵלֵינוּ מְגַלְחִין בַּמוֹעֵד. הַבָּא מִמְּדִינַת הַיָּם, וּמִבֵּית הַשְּׁבִיָּה, וְהַיּוֹצֵא מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִין, וְהַמְּנַדֵּה שְׁהַתִּירוֹ לוֹ חֻכְמִים; וְכֵן מִי שֶׁנִּשְׁאַל לְחֻכְם וְהִתֵּר, וְהַנְּזִיר, וְהַמְּצַרֵּעַ הָעוֹלָה מִטְּמֵאָתוֹ לְטַהֲרָתוֹ.

Moed Katan 3:1

And these may shave and cut their hair on Chol Hamoed (the intermediate days of a Festival): One who arrives from overseas; and one who is released from a house of captivity; and one who comes out of prison; and one who had been ostracized and the Sages released him; and similarly one who requested a Sage to dissolve his vow of not cutting his hair, and was released from it; and the Nazirite; and the leper who needs to shave his entire body in order to leave his state of ritual impurity and regain his ritual purity. Since these people were not able to cut their hair on the eve of the Festival, they are permitted to do so on the intermediate days of the Festival.

Insights

What is Chol Hamoed? The words Chol Hamoed literally means “the weekday of the holiday” and refers to the “intermediate period” of the festivals of Passover and Sukkot.

Work is prohibited during the full-fledged festival days of Pesach and Sukkot, much like Shabbat. On Chol Hamoed, however, we are permitted to do many activities, such as using electricity or driving a car.

The Rambam (12th-century scholar) explains that Chol Hamoed is called a holy gathering and is the time when the Festival sacrifice was brought in the Temple. There are four mitzvos of the Torah that are called a sign of G-d’s special relationship with us: Circumcision, Shabbat, Yom Tov (including Chol Hamoed), and Tefillin. Because Chol Hamoed is included in this very special category, we should treat Chol Hamoed with great respect. For example, our attire should be similar to what we wear on Shabbat.

Our Sages tell us that during Chol Hamoed, we should increase our Torah study.

Our Mishnah deals with the laws of Chol Hamoed. The Sages prohibited shaving or taking a haircut during Chol Hamoed. The reason is that they were concerned one would delay the haircut until Chol Hamoed, when they have more time, and enter Yomtov in a disheveled state.

Our Mishna mentions various situations when permission was granted to have a haircut on Chol Hamoed. Since he did not take a haircut before Yomtov because it was forbidden, we can assume that if he were permitted, he would not delay the haircut till Chol Hamoed.



Vav

is the sixth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of ‘six’. The meaning of vav is ‘and’. The first time it is used is in the opening verse of the Torah. “In the beginning G-d created the heavens and [vav] the earth.” It serves to join heaven and earth, spirit and matter. Likewise, the human being is a fusion of the spirit and matter, the soul and the body. The shape of the vav symbolizes humility. Humility is the key to creating harmony between body and soul.

ברכות וא

כַּיֵּצֵד מְבָרְכִין עַל הַפְּרוֹת? עַל פְּרוֹת הָאֵילָן אוֹמֵר "בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ", חוּץ מִן הַיַּיִן; שְׁעַל הַיַּיִן אוֹמֵר "בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן". וְעַל פְּרוֹת הָאָרֶץ אוֹמֵר "בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה", חוּץ מִן הַפֶּת; שְׁעַל הַפֶּת הוּא אוֹמֵר "הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ". וְעַל הַיִּרְקוֹת אוֹמֵר "בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה". רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: "בוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי דְשָׂאִים."

Berachot 6:1

What blessing does one make on fruits? On fruits that grow on trees one says: “Who creates the fruit of the tree”, except wine. Although wine is produced from a fruit of the tree, due to its significance, its blessing differs from other fruits of the tree. Over wine one recites: “Who creates the fruit of the vine.” On fruits that grow from the earth, one says: “Who creates the fruit of the ground”, except for bread; on bread one recites: “Who brings forth bread from the earth.” Bread, too, is significant and its blessing differs from other fruits of the ground. Over herbs and vegetables, one says: “Who creates the fruit of the ground.” Rabbi Yehuda says: “Who creates various kinds of herbs.”

Insights

Why do we make a blessing before eating?

King David writes in Psalms, “The earth is G-d’s.” Our Sages infer that before benefitting from G-d’s world, we must ask permission by reciting a blessing; otherwise, it would be tantamount to stealing.

Chassidic teachings explain that all food contains a Gdly spark of holiness. When we say a blessing before eating and eat with the intention to serve Gd, we actually elevate the physical substance of the food into holiness and reunite it with its Divine source.

Every blessing begins with “Blessed are you G-d”. How can we, a mere mortal and a finite being, bless G-d, the Creator of the universe who lacks nothing?

Our Sages offer more sublime and profound explanations. Each time we make a blessing, we do not bless G-d; we acknowledge that G-d is the source of all our successes and prosperity.

Another explanation: The translation of the Hebrew word for blessing, ‘Bracha’, can be a ‘wellspring’. Each time we make a blessing we request G-d that His spiritual energy flow upon us.

Expressing our gratitude to G-d is not only when we partake of food. A great Rabbi once explained that one of the responses to death and mourning is silence; when we lose a loved one, we need to offer G-d a silent prayer of thanks. We need to recognize how our loved ones enriched our lives by being such an integral part of it, and we realize how our lives would have been lacking without their presence.

As you mark the yahrtzeit of your loved one, take a moment to reflect on the blessings you received by their presence in your life.

Kaf



is the eleventh letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of ‘twenty’. The kaf represents a ‘crown’. In Ethics of our Fathers it states, “There are three types of crowns: The crown of the Torah, the crown of Priesthood, and the crown of Kingship. However, the crown of possessing a good name stands higher than the previous three”. To become a great Torah scholar you need to be blessed with superior intellect and have the opportunity to devote your life to studying Torah. A Cohen is an inherited right. Likewise, you are born into a royal family. However, the crown of a good name is accessible to all.

שבת כא,א

בְּיָמֵינוּ אֵת בְּנוֹ וְהָאָבִן בְּיָדוֹ, וְכִלְכָּלָהּ וְהָאָבִן
 בְּתוֹכָהּ. וּמִטְלָטְלִין תְּרוּמָה טְמֵאָה עִם הַטְּהוֹרָה וְעִם
 הַחֲלִין. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: אֶף מֵעֲלִין אֶת הַמְדַמֵּעַ
 בְּאַחַד וּמֵאָה.

Shabbat 21:1

On Shabbos, one may take his son into the house, even though there is a stone, which is muktzeh (cannot be moved), in the child's hand. And it is permissible to take a basket with a stone inside on Shabbat. And one may move ritually impure teruma (food designated for the Cohen), which may not be eaten and is muktzeh (cannot be moved), with ritually pure teruma, as well as with non-sacred produce. Rabbi Yehuda says: One may even lift a measure of teruma that was nullified from a mixture of one hundred measures of non-sacred produce and one measure of teruma.

Insights

There are thirty-nine categories of work prohibited on Shabbat by Torah Law. Many have the misconception that Jewish law prohibits labor on the Shabbat and, therefore, they don't understand why we cannot turn on a light that takes no effort. Or driving a car to the synagogue, which takes less effort than walking.

The mistake lies in the inaccurate translation of one word in the Torah. When the Torah discusses the prohibition of not working on Shabbat, it does not use the word 'avodah' which is translated as work or labor. Instead, it uses the word 'melacha' which means a creative activity that demonstrates man's mastery over nature. By refraining from such actions, we acknowledge that G-d is the ultimate Creator and Master.

The Sages also enacted edicts whose purpose are to preserve the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest and holiness. One such law is called muktzeh - certain objects must be set aside and not moved on Shabbat.

Some reasons for this law are: Since it is forbidden to work on Shabbat, one might utilize the free time to rearrange the items in their home and carry them from one place to another, in contrast to the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest.

The Sages restricted the handling of items whose primary function is for an activity forbidden on Shabbat. Writing on the Shabbat is one of the thirty-nine Torah prohibitions. If we were permitted to hold a pen, inadvertently we may come to write with it. To safeguard this law, the Sages decreed that handling a pen is prohibited.



Nun

is the fourteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'fifty'. Nun means 'fish' in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud. When we stand by the sea and look down, all we see is water. Yet, we know beneath the surface there are thousands of different species of fish, coral, and vegetation. The fact that we can't see it does not negate its existence. Similarly, there is a spiritual world where the soul of the departed resides. Our inability to see it does not mean that it doesn't exist.

ש

Shin

is the twenty-first letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'three hundred'. On the tefillin worn on the head are two shins - one with three vertical lines protruding from the base and one with four. They symbolize our three forefathers and our four mothers. When one loses a parent, mourning is for twelve months. For all other blood relatives, mourning is for thirty days. When we lose a parent, we have lost the golden link in the chain that takes us all the way back to Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, and Leah. Hence, the mourning is more intense.

שקלים גא

שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר שׁוֹפְרוֹת, שֶׁל שָׁה עָשָׂר שְׁלֹחֲנוֹת, שְׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר הַשְּׁתַּחֲוִיּוֹת הָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ. שֶׁל בַּיִת רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל וְשֶׁל בַּיִת רַבִּי חַנִּינָא סָגְן הַכֹּהֲנִים, הָיוּ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִין אַרְבַּע עָשָׂר. וְהֵיכָן הִיְתָה יְתָרָה? כְּנֶגֶד דִּיר הָעֵצִים, שָׁכַן מִסֶּרֶת בְּיָדָם מֵאַבוֹתֵיהֶם שְׁשָׁם הָאָרוֹן נִגְנָז.

Shekalim 6,1

In the Temple there were thirteen chests, thirteen tables and thirteen prostrations. Members of the household of Rabban Gamaliel and of Rabbi Chanina, the chief of the priests, would prostrate fourteen times. And where was the additional prostration? In front of the wood storage yard, for they had a tradition from their ancestors that the Ark was hidden there.

Insights

King Solomon built the First Temple in 827 BCE, and it lasted for 410 years until the Greek Assyrian Empire destroyed it. The Jewish people were sent to exile in Babylonia for 70 years. It was during this period that the miracle of Purim happened. The Jewish people then returned to the Land of Israel, and under the guidance of the Prophets Ezra and Nechemya the Second Temple was built. It was completed in the year 349 BCE and lasted for 420 years. During this period the miracle of Chanukah occurred. It was destroyed by the Roman Empire in the year 69 CE. The third and final Temple will be built by Moshiach speedily in our days.

Three times a year - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - all males would make a pilgrimage to the Temple. There were ten constant miracles in the Temple. One of them was that even though the altar was outside and exposed to the heavens, the rain never extinguished its fire. Similarly, even though the altar was open to the elements, the winds never disturbed the smoke from rising straight upward

like a pillar.

The Temples were the center of Jewish life. Our prayers focus on beseeching G-d that He should bring the Jewish people home and rebuild the Temple.

There is a fascinating discussion concerning the actual construction of the Third Temple: Either Moshiach and the Jewish people will build it, or as others say, it will descend from heaven. The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that the two opinions are not necessarily contradictory. One of the suggestions he offers is that the Temple will initially be built by Moshiach together with the Jewish people. And then, a spiritual covering will descend from heaven and enclose the Temple, thereby ensuring that the structure will be eternal.



Mem

is the thirteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'forty'. The word mem stands for mayim, which means water. A human being cannot survive without water.

Torah, the most vital element in our spiritual lives, is referred to as water, as it states: "Water refers to Torah." Just as a human being cannot survive without water, a Jew cannot survive without Torah. By studying the mishnayot in this booklet, you will receive spiritual sustenance.

ברכות ג:א

מי שְׁמֵתוֹ מְטַל לְפָנָיו פְּטוּר מִקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע, וּמִן הַתְּפִלָּה, וּמִן הַתְּפִלִּין. נוֹשְׂאֵי הַמֶּטֶה וְחַלּוּפֵיהֶן וְחַלּוּפֵי חַלּוּפֵיהֶן, אֶת שְׁלֹפְנֵי הַמֶּטֶה, וְאֶת שְׁלֹאֲחֵי הַמֶּטֶה: אֶת שְׁלֹמֶטָה צָרָךְ בָּהֶן פְּטוּרִין, וְאֶת שְׂאִין לַמֶּטֶה צָרָךְ בָּהֶן חִיבִין. אֵלוֹ וְאֵלוֹ פְּטוּרִין מִן הַתְּפִלָּה

Berachot 3:1

One whose deceased relative is not yet buried is exempt from reading the Shema and the Amida prayer, and from the mitzvah to wear tefillin, until the deceased has been buried. Concerning the pallbearers and their replacements and the replacements of their replacements, those located before the coffin who have not yet carried the deceased and those located after the coffin: Those who are needed to carry the coffin are exempt from reciting Shema; while those who are not needed to carry the coffin, are obligated to recite Shema. However, both are exempt from reciting the Amida prayer.

Insights

Caring for the dead is referred to as Chesed Shel Emmes – genuine kindness. When our forefather Yaacov was on his death bed, he instructed his son Yoseph to ensure that he would be transported from Egypt and buried in Israel. Yaacov said to Yoseph, "If you fulfill my request, you will have performed an act of kindness and truth."

It is called genuine kindness because when you do a favor for a living person, in the back of your mind, there is always the thought that perhaps the recipient of my favor will repay me later. However, when doing something for the deceased there is no expectation of ever receiving anything in return.

Why do we observe "kavod ha-met", respect for the dead?

When a person passes away, the neshama (the soul) still feels a connection to its body and stays near it until the burial. During this time period, the soul is aware of how its body is being treated and derives comfort knowing that its body is being given the ultimate respect.

Another reason is the very core of existence and why G-d created the universe.

G-d wanted a home in the physical world. According to the Chassidic masters, this is why the soul descended from heaven and partnered with its physical body. Only the combined effort of body and soul can reveal G-d's presence in this material world. Therefore, when the soul returns home to its Maker, we must offer the greatest level of respect to the soul's worldly partner.

It is worth mentioning that even after the burial, a part of the soul resides permanently at the gravesite. This explains why we visit our loved ones at the cemetery. We are not just visiting a slab of marble and lifeless remains, but rather, part of the eternal spirit of our beloved departed relative.



Hay

is the fifth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'five'. The soul has five levels: nefesh, ruach, neshama, and yechidah Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe and the founder of Colel Chabad, writes that the soul is 'truly a part of G-d above'. Therefore, there is no such thing as a distant Jew as our souls are always bound and one with G-d.

ברכות ט,א

הַרוּאָה מְקוֹם שֶׁנִּעְשׂוּ בוֹ נִסִּים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אֹמֵר
 "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה". מְקוֹם
 שֶׁנִּעְקְרָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, אֹמֵר "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָקַר
 "עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה מֵאַרְצֵנוּ".

Berachot 9,1

One who sees a place where miracles occurred on Israel's behalf recites: "Blessed... Who performed miracles for our forefathers in this place." When in a place where idolatry was eradicated, one recites: "Blessed... Who eradicated idolatry from our land."

Insights

What is the secret of Jewish survival? Throughout our history we have lived through pogroms, the crusades, the inquisition, and the holocaust, and somehow, we have survived. And not only have we survived, but we have also flourished.

There is only one explanation we can offer, and that is Divine intervention. Our existence is truly miraculous.

In truth, our very beginning was miraculous. The first Jew to be born was Yitzchak, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Both were of an age where they could no longer bear children. G-d performed a miracle and they were blessed with the first Jewish child. From that moment on, our survival has been nothing short of miraculous.

A great Rabbi who lived in the middle-ages wrote: Every time I wake up in the morning and see myself in the mirror, I am witnessing a miracle far greater than the splitting of the sea. I see a Jew who has lived through the destruction of Two Temples. I

see a Jew who has been dispersed to the four corners of the globe and has been exiled for over 1500 years. I see a Jew who has lived through the crusades, the inquisition, and the pogroms.

We can add that when we look in the mirror, we see a Jew who lived through the holocaust and lost 6 million family members. And yet, we are still here. Is this then not the greatest miracle of all? People often say that if we saw miracles like the Jews who left Egypt, we would believe.

If you saw freedom for 8 million Jews from the Former Soviet Union, then know you saw the freedom of 3 million Jews from Egypt.

If you saw our soldiers at the Western Wall on June 7, 1967, then know you have seen a shepherd boy slaying the mighty giant Goliath.

And if you saw the whispering embers rebuild the Jewish world, then know you saw the dry bones of Ezekiel come back to life.