



GLOBAL WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN TO LEARN PIRKEI AVOS

לע"נ הרב מנחם מענדל ע"ה בן יבלח"ט הרב ישראל שיחי'

Perek Hey | Sicha Chelek Yud Zayin

משינה כ"א

בן היא הא אומר: לפום צערא אגרא.

Ben Hei Hei would say:
According to the pain is the reward.

DID YOU KNOW?

Because he is a ger, Ben Hei Hei is considered like the son of Avraham and Sarah who each had an extra "hei" added to their name. That's why he is known as Ben Hei Hei.

INTERESTING FACT

DID YOU KNOW?

PARTING WORDS

According to some opinions, this is the final Mishna of the original text of Pirkei Avos. This Mishna is coming to wrap it up and teach us how we should implement all of Pirkei Avos by serving Hashem and going the extra mile, beyond the keeping of mitzvos.

INTERESTING FACT

Ben Hei Hei would say, "According to the pain is the reward."

In a certain sense, Hashem is like our Employer. He wants us to do a job for Him, namely to make a Dirah B'sachtonim through learning Torah and doing Mitzvos, and He rewards us accordingly. Let's compare the laws of an employer and employee to our relationship in serving Hashem.

Basic Halacha

When a hired worker does work, the employer is obligated to pay the worker according to his effort, regardless of his success. If Shmerel is employed to mow Berel's grass and it is extra hard for him because the ground is full of rocks and it takes longer, Shmerel must be paid for his efforts and time, not for the end result that Berel's grass was cut. If Sara has to travel to do a job for Perel, Sara should be paid for the travel. Even if the results are less than satisfactory, if Sara has put in sincere effort, she should be paid unless stipulated otherwise.

Our Employer

Hashem is like an employer. He expects us to keep the mitzvos and promises us rewards for doing so. If an employer is halachically obligated to pay according to the effort, and not the results, then obviously we can expect the same from Hashem. When we put effort into doing a mitzva we know that Hashem rewards our efforts regardless of the results. He can see our hard work and rewards us accordingly.

The only problem with that assumption is that we're learning Pirkei Avos. Pirkei Avos is here to teach us to go beyond the letter of the law, not just follow the law. And as we saw earlier when learning the Halachos of an employer and worker - every employer is obligated to pay according to the effort, not the outcome. So this doesn't seem very impressive for the Creator of the Universe...

What is the new teaching that Ben Hei Hei is teaching us about Hashem?

Another Halacha

If Shmerel does extra work because he wants to, Berel only has to pay Shmerel to the extent that Berel appreciates what Shmerel did. In other words, if Shmerel decides on his own to mow the backyard in addition to the front yard, but Berel really doesn't care about the backyard, Berel does not need to pay Shmerel for the extra work, or he can pay very little - regardless of how much effort Shmerel put into it. The employer only needs to pay according to results— how much or little he personally benefits from the job. He does not need to pay for the effort.

Hiddurim

Pirkei Avos is all about pushing us to be extra careful and work on ourselves to perfect our serving Hashem.

Hopefully, we decide to internalize some of the lessons we have learned and to voluntarily take on something additional in our yiddishkeit, an extra hiddur. According to the previous halacha, Hashem is only "obligated" to reward us according to how successful we are in keeping this extra hiddur. However if we work really hard and yet we fail to keep this hiddur, Hashem owes us nothing because it is voluntary. It is not part of a Yid's obligations.

Paid Volunteer

Here is where Ben Hei Hei - who was a Ger, and had few obligations to Hashem but nevertheless chose to keep Mitzvos for the rest of his life - reassures us. Hashem does reward effort in hiddurim. Hashem goes beyond what is expected and amply rewards us for any effort we put in to add extra care and beauty in our yiddishkeit, even though

He doesn't "have to".

In a small way, when we take on something extra we are acting like a Ger with that specific undertaking. We aren't obligated, yet we offer to do this. Even when acting like a Ben Hei Hei, someone who does what he can to enhance his mitzvos, we are still rewarded "lefum tzara agra". Hashem will reward us according to our efforts even if our outcome is not what we were hoping. This is the extra kindness of Hashem that is being taught to us in this Mishna.

Back to Halacha

If the employer shows clearly that he is pleased that the worker is volunteering to do this extra job, then it may come across as an expectation. The worker may not consider it as a volunteer job. Berel is really happy that Shmerel mowed the backyard, and expresses his thrill at having a beautifully mowed lawn - then Shmerel might think it is now part of what's expected of him, and Berel now needs to pay him for the effort of what he put in, not only the results of the job itself.

We clearly know Hashem is happy when we take on extra hiddurim, yet perhaps we may feel that it is expected of us and we feel pressured to do them! In that case, Hashem is obligated to pay us according to the effort as is taught in basic halacha.

What then is Ben Hei Hei adding in this Mishna as the extra kindness from Hashem?



Another Halacha

If the voluntary worker causes damage while doing his extra job, the employer does not need to pay him. Unless he is very poor, and in that case, the extra kind thing to do is to provide him enough pay for one meal for that day. Shmerel accidentally breaks the swing set in Berel's backyard while mowing it, Berel doesn't need to pay Shmerel for the extra mowing job at all - in fact, Shmerel needs to pay Berel for the damage that happened to his swing set.

Don't Be Shy

Here is where we see the special kindness of Hashem. Sometimes we can take on a hiddur and we can mess up. We can forget to do it or we can not do it properly. Being that there is no limit in how perfect a mitzva can be, such slip ups are inevitable. This would cause a certain lack in the mitzva that wouldn't have been there had he not taken on that hiddur. A person may think, better I shouldn't have taken on something extra. Better not to take the chance of me causing an "imperfect" mitzvah by not doing the extra hiddur as it should be. Maybe it would be safer if I just stick to my basic obligations.

Ben Hei Hei is saying, "No!"

Even if an employer doesn't have to pay for the effort if he didn't ask for the extra work, and he doesn't even have to pay for the result because the worker messed up, Hashem STILL rewards our efforts, even if we mess up! Hashem generously "pays" a person according to his effort even if he volunteers his time and resources to add extra beauty to the mitzvah and is not successful, to the extent that the person "messes up" the mitzvah.

Hashem will still pay him, not only for the benefit of the mitzvah, not only for the difficulty of going the extra mile for hiddurim, he will even pay him for the mistakes he made, because he put in effort.

Hashem not only values our efforts more than the results, but He even values our failures!

And being that we depend on Hashem for everything we have, we are definitely considered one who doesn't have enough for a meal. The meal that the employer pays to the voluntary worker who does damage is a meal according to the standards of the Employer. Hashem is infinite and his standards are infinite. Hashem will therefore shower down on us infinite brachos and rewards for our efforts, no matter how many mistakes we make in our effort to do mitzvos.

Think and Discuss

- How does our desire to be perfect sometimes backfire?
- What new endeavor or hachlata am I resisting doing because of the fear that I may fail?
- How can reminding ourselves about how much Hashem values our efforts, and even our failures-- motivate us?

A Story

A storekeeper from Polotzk, a chassid called R. Yisrael, once visited the Tzemach Tzedek in Lubavitch for Shabbos Parshas Vayeira. He was no scholar, but while there he listened to a maamar in which the Rebbe quoted the teaching that "Avraham Avinu was generous – with his body, his money and his soul."

In this connection the Tzemach Tzedek quoted a teaching of the Pardes in the name of Sefer HaBahir: "The Attribute of Kindness complained to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Master of the Universe! Ever since Avram has been on earth, I have not been required to perform my tasks, for Avram is there to function instead of me!'"

To this the Tzemach Tzedek added that Avraham Avinu, down here on earth, by means of his acts of material kindness substituted the Sefirah of Chessed of the World of Atzilus! From this it is clear that Avraham Avinu was superior to the Attribute of Chessed of Atzilus, because if Chessed of Atzilus were to be down here, it would not be able to vest itself in materiality – whereas Avraham Avinu did draw it down into materiality. And this was enabled by the superiority of an embodied soul, in the spirit of the mystical principle of beirurim.

The whole scholarly maamar was beyond the grasp of this good man, but those words permeated him so profoundly that he repeated them to himself until he had them memorized.

Now, in those days, whenever a chassid came home from Lubavitch, his friends would welcome him home with a comradely farbrengen at which they would ask him what he had heard and seen there.

Someone asked him, "Could you please repeat the maamar for us?"

"No," he answered, "but I can repeat for you the few words that I memorized."

This he did, and went off as usual to his stall at the marketplace. Once there, he decided to call on his friend, Nachman the Storekeeper, to ask for a gemilus chessed, a loan. Not that he needed the money: he just wanted to give Nachman the zechus, the meritorious opportunity, to fulfill the mitzvah of gemilus chassadim. He then did the same with Yosef the Storekeeper, and from then on, day after day, they would all borrow money from each other.

During R. Yisrael's next visit to Lubavitch, the Tzemach Tzedek stepped out of his study, entered the beis midrash, and asked one of the gabbaim to point out to him R. Yisrael the Storekeeper. That gabbai had no answer, because R. Yisrael was not one of the better-known chassidim. So the Tzemach Tzedek asked Chayim Ber, who said, "That's R. Yisrael the Storekeeper from Polotzk," and the Tzemach Tzedek asked that R. Yisrael be invited to enter his study.

When the Tzemach Tzedek asked him there about his daily doings, he said that he rose at five, read Tehillim, drank tea, chopped the day's firewood, went off to the local beis midrash to daven, learned a chapter of Mishnayos, went home, had a bite of breakfast, and went to the marketplace. Late in the afternoon he returned to the beis midrash for Minchah, listened in to the daily shiur in Ein Yaakov, davened Maariv, and then went home.

The Tzemach Tzedek had another question: "Nu, and what about tzedakah?"

R. Yisrael answered that he was a poor man and had nothing to give – until the Tzemach Tzedek steered the conversation in the direction of his daily custom with regard to gemilus chassadim.

The Rebbe Maharash, who was particularly close to his father and lived in the same house, later took the liberty of asking his father, "What did you see on him?"

The Tzemach Tzedek replied, "Over Yisrael the Storekeeper I saw a pillar of light – from the Divine Attribute of Chessed of the World of Atzilus..."

(Sefer Hasichos 5701 Parshas Vayeira p. 45)

Connect the Dots

Although Reb Yisroel didn't have the resources to give a lot of tzedakah, he took upon himself this loan system with his friends which literally channeled Chessed of Atzilus upon him! Hashem cherished and rewarded his earnestness and sincerity in wanting to do chessed, even though he wasn't giving conventional tzedakah or loans. Our efforts and sincerity are the utmost precious to Hashem and He rewards us for it!