

INTRODUCTION TO PIRKEI AVOS

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BIURIM L’PIRKEI AVOS INTRODUCTION TO AVOS

**By the
Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Translated, adapted and annotated by
Rabbi Heschel Greenberg**

**Edited by Rabbi Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufman
o.b.m.**

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L'hafotzas Sichos

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Each and every Jew should add on a new dimension of Torah study—in terms of quantity as well as quality... in one's general lessons that are relevant to all, and particularly in these days—the recitation of Pirkei Avos throughout all the summer Sabbaths. It would be wonderful if one could also learn, one (or several) Mishna(yos) , in depth, with full understanding and comprehension...

(Sefer HaSichos, 5751, p. 560)

It would be worthwhile and appropriate that each and every one should accept upon himself, that in addition to the recitation of Pirkei Avos (“words of piety”), one should also add the in depth study of (at least) one Mishnah with the classic commentators of the Mishnah, each according to his capacity and level.

(Sefer HaSichos, 5751, p. 597)

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

In honor of the illustrious day, *Yud Aleph Nissan*—the eleventh day of Nissan, the 115th birthday of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, we are publishing, with G-d's help, the introduction of the Rebbe to Pirkei Avos.

This introduction constitutes the first installment of a voluminous work: the translation and adaptation of the Rebbe's talks and discourses on the classic Pirkei Avos.

Pirkei Avos is one the most cherished classics of Judaism. Although it is a part of a larger classic—the Mishnah—it is without any question the most popular section of the Oral tradition. Countless editions have been published, hundreds and thousands of commentaries have been composed, and millions of Jews have recited her sagacious, beautiful and inspiring words for centuries.

But as with all other parts of Torah, Chassidus has added a new perspective, probing beneath the surface to find the soul of the text. Pirkei Avos is no exception to the light that has been shined on Torah by the Chasidic masters.

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Our generation, in particular, has been fortunate in having the Lubavitcher Rebbe as its leader and mentor. There is not an area of Torah knowledge—from Biblical and Talmudic literature to Kabbalah and Chassidus—that has not been illuminated by the Rebbe’s profound and radiant teachings. In addition to the Rebbe’s focus on taking generations of Chassidic teaching and bringing it down to our level, the Rebbe has also added novel insights that place the text in a refreshing new light.

Fortunately, for our generation, much of what the Rebbe has contributed in his thousands of talks and discourses have been committed to writing. There are about 150 volumes of these talks and another 50 volumes of the Rebbe’s correspondence and other works that have been published to date, and many more that await publication. And we are doubly fortunate that many of these published talks have been translated into English and other languages.

* * *

The Rebbe has frequently given lengthy discourses on Pirkei Avos (known popularly as “Ethics of the Fathers” but more accurately

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rendered as “Chapters of the Fathers”). *Va’ad L’Hafotzas Sichos* has published a two-volume anthology *Biurim l’Pirkei Avos*, on Pirkei Avos, the fourth edition appearing in 1996, culling from hundreds of the Rebbe’s talks. However, this excellent anthology does not present the Rebbe’s talks in their entirety. Only the main points were selected to give one easy access to the Rebbe’s insights in capsule form, but they do not capture, nor were they intended to capture, the full flavor and depth of the original.

There have been, to the best of my knowledge three different English anthologies, culled from the Rebbe’s works on Pirkei Avos. They are excellent works, and the translator is indebted to them for the pioneering task of adapting the Rebbe’s talks on Pirkei Avos, which proved invaluable in putting together this collection of essays. However, these works, like their Hebrew counterpart, contain only excerpts of the Rebbe’s lengthy discourses, and/or adaptations of only a small percentage of what the Rebbe has said on Pirkei Avos over the years.

The current project was to take the Rebbe’s talks in their entirety and have them trans-

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lated and adapted into English, so that one can savor at least some of the flavor of the original. To give the reader a sense of the difference in scope: The anthologized version of the introduction in *Biurim l'Pirkei Avos* that this introduction is based on, is less than a fifth of what has been translated in this English adaptation. (In addition, much of the introduction there deals with the connections between the chapters of Avos. These commentaries were not translated for this volume, and will be included, G-d willing, in future volumes.)

However, not all the essays were translated directly from one talk. There are occasions where the Rebbe's comment may have been an isolated one that occupies only a paragraph, or a footnote. or two in a talk that focuses on an entirely different topic. Invariably, there was some essay that connected to that short comment and it was "woven in" and incorporated into either the text or a footnote of that essay.

It is also important to bear in mind that many of the talks from which these essays were culled were based exclusively on a listener's account. In addition, most of the Reb-

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be's discussions on Pirkei Avos were on a Shabbos, when the only tool available to preserve these talks was memory. And although, the people charged with the responsibility to retain the Rebbe's talks (that lasted some three to six hours on a Shabbos afternoon), were competent, inadvertent errors certainly could have crept into the text. Only a **small** percentage of these talks were reviewed and edited for publication by the Rebbe personally. They have been collected and included in the 39 volume *Likkutei Sichos* and the 12 volume *Sefer Hasichos* series.

* * *

When the classic discourse of the Rebbe, The Essence of Chassidus, was published 26 years ago by *Va'ad l'hafotzas Sichos* as a gift to the Rebbe on the occasion of his 76th birthday, the Rebbe remarked to a member of his secretariat that he hoped that his works would not be translated literally. Rather, the Rebbe expressed his desire that they be written as if they were originally written in English. And while this poses a formidable challenge to any translator and editor, it is our hope that

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we did not deviate too far from the Rebbe's wishes.

* * *

This book consists of ten essays that explain the custom of saying Pirkei Avos between Passover and Shavuos and the custom that continues to recite it throughout the summer. In addition, the essays explain the reason for the name Avos as well as the internal structure of this fundamental treatise.

* * *

I am grateful to Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufman, a Shaliach of the Rebbe in New Orleans, for his editing of this work. May Hashem reward them amply for their efforts.

I am also grateful to Rabbi Zalman Chanin of the Vaad L'hatotzas Sichos for his financial support for this project and for his dedication to the publishing and dissemination of the Rebbe's works.

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The Rebbe on several occasions connected the study of Pirkei Avos with the coming of Moshiach. So it is my fervent wish and hope

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that this modest contribution to the dissemination of the *Rebbe's* essays on Pirkei Avos will hasten the day when we will all see the Rebbe lead us to *Eretz Yisroel*, with the imminent *Geulah Sheleimah*, may it happen immediately!

* * *

I want to dedicate the publication of this volume to the memory of Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufman of blessed memory, who passed away just a few months ago. May we see soon the fulfillment of the promise, “And those who repose in the earth shall awaken and sing,” with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

* * *

Our most fervent prayer is to see the full revelation of Moshiach, so we can hear once again his brilliant and inspiring expositions of Pirkei Avos along with all the other new dimensions of Torah—*Torah Chadashah me'iti teitzei*—that will be revealed, with the immi-

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nent coming of Moshiach and the genuine
and complete Redemption.

Heschel Greenberg

22 Nissan, 5775

Williamsville, New York

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ESSAY ONE PRELUDE TO SINAI

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ESSAY ONE

PRELUDE TO SINAI

Reasons for Reciting Pirkei Avos

It is a well-known practice throughout the Jewish community to recite and study¹ the

¹ The most prevalent custom is to simply recite Pirkei Avos without much attention paid to the proper comprehension of the subject matter. This appears inconsistent with the requirement to understand what one says with regard to the teachings of the Oral Torah (See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Admor Hazaken*, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* end of chapter 2). Perhaps the reason for this is that the text of Pirkei Avos has been inserted into the *Siddur* (Prayer book) as a continuation of the *Mincha* (Afternoon) service. And since prayer is not a formal learning experience (See *Rivash*, Responsa, sec. 157 cited and elucidated by *Tzemach Tzedek Shoresch Mitzvas Hatefilah* chapter 6): “I pray according to the understanding of an infant.”), the need for comprehension is not that crucial. However, since Pirkei Avos is a part of the Oral Torah it would be advisable to

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Talmudic treatise known either as *Avos* (Fathers)² or *Pirkei Avos* (Chapters of the Fathers) between the two festivals of Passover and Shavuot.

study at least one or several *Mishnayos* (each chapter of the Mishnah is divided into paragraphs, referred to in the singular as Mishnah and the plural as *Mishnayos*) in depth. (*Sefer Hasichos* 5751, volume 2, p. 560, 664.)

An explanation is still needed as to why the *Alter Rebbe* included the entire text of *Avos* in his *Siddur* (See *Sha'ar Hakolel*, Chapter 30:3). *Avos* is Torah study, while the *Siddur's* function is for prayer "The order of prayers for the entire year." And while the *Alter Rebbe* includes various directives regarding the laws of prayer culled from the *Shulchan Aruch*, and similarly, here he writes about the custom to recite *Avos* on Shabbos after *Mincha*, this does not, however, justify the inclusion of the entire text of *Avos* in his *Siddur*. Even with regard to certain prayers, the *Alter Rebbe* simply wrote: "You will find this prayer above," or: you will find it in the *Machzor*." Why then did he incorporate *Pirkei Avos* in his *Siddur*. This matter calls for further examination. (From the talk of *Shabbos parshas Naso*, 5747)

² See Essay Ten/"Whose Fathers?" for the reasons it is called *Avos*

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Rabbi *Schneur Zalman* of *Liadi*, known as the *Alter Rebbe* writes:³

It is customary to recite⁴ Chapters of the Fathers,⁵ a chapter each Sabbath, between

³ [Rabbi *Schneur Zalman* of *Liadi*, known as the *Alter Rebbe*, the first of the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty and the founder of the Chabad movement was the author of many legal and mystical/philosophical works. The most famous are the *Tanya* and the *Alter Rebbe's* or the *Rav's Shulchan Aruch*. R. *Schneur Zalman* also published a prayer book that conformed to the mystical teachings of the *Arizal*. In addition, he added brief instructions before certain key parts of the prayer book including the recitation of *Pirkei Avos*. – Translator's note.]

⁴ *Abudraham* (end of the order of the days of the *Omer*). *Tur, Orach Chaim* #292. *Rashi* in his *Sefer Hapardes* (meaning of the prayers) and *Siddur Rav Anmram Gaon* (citing *Rav Hai Gaon*) state that the custom is to **learn** *Pirkei Avot* during *Shabbat*.

⁵ The fact that the *Alter Rebbe* writes “it is customary to recite Chapters of the Fathers, a chapter each Sabbath,” and not simply, “It is customary to recite a chapter of (Tractate) *Avos* each Sabbath” indicates that each chapter possesses independent significance. This has a practical

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Passover and Shavuot⁶... Some have the custom to continue this practice throughout all the Sabbaths⁷ of the summer.⁸

implication with regard to the controversy as to whether one can celebrate a *siyum* (festive meal that one makes upon concluding a major work of Torah, such as the conclusion of the study of an entire tractate of the Talmud. When one attends such a celebration, for example, on the day before Passover, a first-born would be exempt from fasting) with the conclusion of just one chapter of a Tractate of the Talmud. (From the Talk of *Shabbas Parshas Matos-Masei*, 5737.)

⁶ *Sefer Hapardes* as well as *Rav Amram's Siddur* and *Tur* just mention Shabbat, without specifying.

⁷ From the expression “all the Sabbaths” it would seem to indicate that the *Alter Rebbe's* view is that one should recite Pirkei Avos even on the eve of *Tisha b'Av* when it coincides with the Sabbath, despite *Rama's* ruling to the contrary (*Orach Chaim*, end of sec. 553. See also *Magen Avraham* ad loc. and this is, in fact, the custom in many communities) Indeed, many later authorities expressed puzzlement at his ruling (see *Taz*, ad loc. *Siddur*, *Ya'avetz*, Laws of *Bein Hametzarim*; *Ma'amar Mordechai* and *Birkei Yosef* (ad loc.). And especially in light of our cus-

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Among the various reasons given for this custom one finds the following two:⁹

First, Avos provides us with moral guidance and refinement in our lives that makes us receptive to the Torah. Thus, reciting Avos in the weeks before the Festival of Shavuot, the anniversary of the receiving of the Torah, prepares us for this event. This is in conso-

tom not to show any overt signs of mourning on the Sabbath (see *Sdei Chemed*, volume 8, p. 3526), there seems to be no basis for this custom. (Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 19, p. 43.)

⁸ *Rama, Orach Chaim*, end of #292. *Siddur Ha-Ramak* and others. For other customs in this matter see *Machzpor Vitri*, #141. *Kol Bo*, end of #40). It is noteworthy that several of the discourses of my sainted father-in-law, the *Rebbe (Rayatz)*, that were delivered after Shavuot, begin with a *Mishnah* of *Pirkei Avot* that are recited during these Sabbaths. [In recent years, the *Rebbe Shlita* would recite publicly *Pirkei Avos* throughout the summer Sabbaths. – Publisher's note]

⁹ Introduction to *Midrash Shmuel*, a major commentary on Avos by R. *Shmuel Uzidah*. See there for additional reasons.

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nance with the dictum: “*Derech Eretz*—Proper comportment and ethical behavior (the subject matter of Avos) comes before the Torah.”¹⁰ This is taken to mean that a person must first be a morally refined person before they can be receptive to the Torah, which is G-dly wisdom.

Second, during the summer, people are generally engaged in health related activities where the focus is on their bodies. The study of Avos ensures that our involvement with our physical well-being should not lead us, G-d forbid, to an inordinate preoccupation with our bodies and its many needs and desires, that could lead to the fulfillment of the Biblical prediction of: “And Israel became fat and rebelled.”¹¹

Based on this second approach we can also appreciate the divergent customs as to whether one should recite Avos throughout the summer months as well. Since the recitation of Avos prevents us from becoming desensitized during the summer months—it would, on the one hand, suffice to do it be-

¹⁰ *Vayikrah Rabbah*, 5:3.

¹¹ *Devarim*, 32:15.

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tween Passover and Shavuos, thus setting the tone for the entire summer.

Those individuals, however, who wish to be more conscientious, or those for who sense greater vulnerability and who need to be a constant state of vigilance—as long as the focus is on the body and its needs for the duration of the summer—they ought to follow the custom of reciting Avos throughout the summer.¹²

¹² Adapted from the talk of *Shabbat Parshat Naso*, 5737, based exclusively on a listener's account. [According to the first reason—that it is a preparation for the receiving of the Torah—there would actually be a need to prepare for two separate periods of receiving the Torah. While the first tablets were received on Shavuot, when the Jewish people were on the level of *Tzadikim*, righteous people, the second tablets were received on Yom Kippur (*Ta'anit*, 30b) at which time the Jewish people had attained the status of *Ba'alei Teshuvah*, penitents, or returnees to G-d. See *Likkutei Sichos* volume 9, p. 242. From the vantage point of *tzadikkim*, it suffices to recite Avos before Shavuos. From the perspective of the *Baalei Teshuvah*, however, it is appropriate to recite Avos throughout the summer Sabbaths as well, as a prelude to the receiving of

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“One Who Wants to be a Chassid”

One can find a Talmudic basis for this explanation that recitation of Pirkei Avos is a protection from spiritual harm. The Talmud states:

Rav Yehudah said: “One who wants to be a *chassid* (one who goes beyond the letter of the law because he is imbued with an inordinate spirit of piety and kindness) should fulfill the words of *nezikin* (study the Talmudic treatment of damages, how they should be avoided).

Rava says: words of Avos; others say words of *Berachos* (blessings).”¹³

Although they appear to be three divergent views about how one becomes a *chassid*, it may be suggested that *Rava*’s point was that by studying Avos one can also eliminate all of the potential damages, physical and spiritual,

the second set of Tablets that were given on Yom Kippur. (*Biurim l’Pirkei Avos*, p. 1.) [For a more extensive treatment of the custom to recite Pirkei Avos throughout the summer see Essay Six.]

¹³ *Bava Kamma* 30a.

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that lurk and threaten us, and thereby also elicit all of the blessings.¹⁴

On another level, one can explain the emphasis of Avos as the means to become a *chassid*¹⁵ and why it is a preparation for Mattan Torah.

Torah is essentially a work that commands us to live our lives in conformity with G-d's laws. Rabbinic literature describes the Torah as having come from the "mouth of the *Gevurah*-the A-mighty,"¹⁶ emphasizing the role of G-d as an all-powerful and mighty law-giver.

One who is entrusted with the responsibility to teach Torah and instruct us about its laws

¹⁴ This paragraph has been adapted from the talk of *Shabbos parshas Pinchas*, based exclusively on a listener's account.

¹⁵ [In the preceding analysis, being a *chassid* is only a defensive measure that prevents one from becoming too materialistic and prevents damage to oneself and others. In the next piece the Rebbe demonstrates how becoming a *chassid* through the study of Avos is a positive force as well. – Translator's note.]

¹⁶ *Rashi, Shemos 19:19. Shelach 15:22.*

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can get the impression that the Torah is all about *gevurah*, harsh, unqualified judgment. There is no room for kindness and compassion.

However, we find the term “*tzedek*” used in conjunction with the laws of the Torah. And while *tzedek* is often translated as justice, righteousness and law,¹⁷ it is also has the connotation of charity and kindness.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Zohar* (II 113b; III 137a, 291b, 292a) cited and elucidated on in *Likkuei Torah*, *Nitzavim* 51c. *Or HaTorah* on *Tehillim*, p. 134. See also *Tikkunei Zohar*, Introduction (*Pasach Eliyahu*) 17b (“*Tzedek* is judgment). *Zohar* III 80b, 85b and references in *Nitzuzei Zohar* ad loc. *Ramban*, *Shoftim* 16:20 (citing *Sefer HaBahir*, sec. 33).

¹⁸ See *Or HaTorah* (loc cit. p. 135) where he adduces proof from (*Tehillim* 48:11): “Your right hand is filled with *tzedek*,” referring to G-d’s kindness. See Guide for the Perplexed, III, chapter 53, where the word *tzedakah* is derived from *tzedek* (this is also supported by *Devarim Rabbah*, *Ekev* 3:7 and *Or HaTorah*, *Vayeira* 98a.): In the “Prophetic books” they will not use the word *tzedakah* to those statues that one is obligated to do. See *Or HaTorah* *ibid*.

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Hence a rabbi, who issues rulings and sits in judgment of others in accordance with the dictates of the Torah, must be cognizant of the ultimate purpose of judgment. Even before he issues a ruling and verdict, the judge must know that the ultimate purpose of judgment (that derives from the Torah, which is known as the “Torah of kindness”) is charity and kindness.¹⁹

The Torah itself invokes this principle of combining justice with kindness in the statement: “And the community will **judge** and the community will **save**.”²⁰ The classical

¹⁹ This premise can also provide a deeper understanding of the law that prohibits rendering justice on the Sabbath, notwithstanding the fact that it would be justice that is based on the Torah. For on the Shabbos day, the purpose of creation is revealed. (This is the inner meaning of the words “*Vayechulu*—and He completed,” also connoting that the world realizes its intended purpose on the Sabbath.) And since the ultimate purpose of all that happens is kindness, for the world was created “for His glory,” and He is the essence of goodness and kindness, it follows that Shabbos is not a time for judgment.

²⁰ *Bamidbar* 35:24-25. See *Rosh Hashanah* 26a.

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interpretation of this verse is that it is imperative for the judges to look for ways of defending the accused, even as they consider the evidence that proves his guilt. One can take this verse and interpret it further: Even when the judges are engaged in the process of judgment, the ultimate outcome will be one of kindness—“the community will save.” However, to facilitate the ultimate kindness, one needs to go through the process of judgment, by clarifying the law.

We can now gain a new understanding as to why we recite Pirkei Avos as a preparation for Shavuot, the Season of the Giving of our Torah. When the Torah was given, the dynamics of law and strict justice were introduced into the world. We therefore recite Pirkei Avos, which comprises “words of *chassidusa*,”²¹ i.e., words that leads one to becoming a *chassid*, one who goes beyond the limits of the law, in terms of kindness and compassion.

²¹ [An expression that paraphrases the statement of the Talmud, cited earlier in the text: “Whoever wants to be a chassid should study words of Avos.” – Translator’s note.]

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By prefacing the recitation and study of Avos before receiving the Torah, we set the tone as to what is the **ultimate** goal of Torah—kindness and going beyond the law.²² And while it is true that one must first conform to the law before they can go beyond it, nevertheless, one must be imbued with the awareness that the goal of the law **is** to go beyond it.^{23 24}

²² It is noteworthy that Avos (“words of *chassidusa*—beyond the law”) is referred to as “ethics of the judges,” by the Rambam (Introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, s.v., *v’hacheilek hashishi*)

²³ [This thought should not be misconstrued that there is ever a time for one to go contrary to the dictates of the Torah. On the contrary, going beyond the law means that one is not content with just doing the minimum in fulfilling one’s obligations in either “man to G-d” or “man to man” matters. In a judicial context this could also mean that despite the fact the person is deemed guilty of a crime and must be punished accordingly, this very system itself is intended not to hurt the person but to help them and to view the punishment as the means to help rehabilitate the person. And after the person receives the punishment, one’s overt attitude to that per-

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son must be one of kindness and compassion, and not view that person as an ex-convict, the attitude that is so prevalent in today's society where stigmas last forever. In this talk the Rebbe also extends the synthesis of righteousness and judgment to include rabbis and judges encouraging people to be more charitable and kind. – Translator's note.]

²⁴ Adapted from *Sefer HaSichos*, volume 2, p. 489.

ESSAY TWO
TASTE OF SINAI

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ESSAY TWO

TASTE OF SINAI

Between Pesach and Shavuos

One of the reasons given for the study of Avos after Passover¹ is that the study and implementation of the ideals of Avos serves as a preparation for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuos.²

¹ *Abudraham, Seder Y'mei Ha'omer. Siddur Admur Hazaken*, and other sources – cited in *Bein Pesach Lishavuos*, (Chapter 5, sec. 28:b, p. 159). See also preceding essay.

² “One who learns Torah must first know the approach to its study and the way one must conduct oneself after learning it. They therefore instituted to study it [Avos] before the Festival of Shavuos so that the hearts of each and every Jew should be receptive to accept the Torah with a complete heart and to conduct themselves properly, in complete accord with its teachings.” (*Midrash Shmuel* *ibid*). *Abudraham* there adds:

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One may add the following point: This function of the study of Avos as a preparation for the giving of the Torah is analogous to that of the Counting of the Omer.³ Avos has been characterized as a tractate that teaches and cultivates proper ethics and good character traits.⁴ Likewise, the Counting of the Omer is

“Because they (i.e., the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot) are days that are counted towards the Giving of the Torah, we therefore count these days, as a loving friend who waits for the arrival of his loving friend from a journey and counts the days and nights until he arrives. Most matters contained within this tractate are geared to encourage us to read the Torah and observe its precepts.”

³ [The Torah commands us to count for forty nine days after the “*omer*” offering has been brought in the Temple on the second day of Passover. The counting ends on the eve of Shavuot. (*Vayikra*). See also introduction to *Midrash Shmuel* who draws an analogy between *counting* of the *omer* and the recitation of Avos. – Translator’s note.]

⁴ *Bartenura*, beginning of Avos.

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intended as a means to refine all⁵ the character traits of our animal souls.⁶

This explanation, however, begs a question. Why would the study of Avos, which commences on the very first Sabbath that follows the Festival of Passover, focus primarily on the preparations for Mattan Torah? Moreo-

⁵ “From *Chesed ShebeChesed* (the attribute of kindness within kindness), to *Malchus ShebeMalchus* (the attribute of leadership within leadership). [There are a total of seven character traits that are listed in Kabbalah. Each one of the seven comprises all the other attributes, so that there are a total of 49 attributes of the animal soul as well as of the G-dly soul, corresponding to the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. The implication of this point is that these days of counting are geared towards refining every nuance of the animal soul. – Translator’s note].

⁶ This is symbolized by the fact that the Omer offering consisted of barley, rather than wheat that is used for all other flour offerings in the Temple. Barley was used primarily as fodder for animals and not for humans. Hence, the symbolism of this offering that was brought on Passover was the need to refine the animal souls. (See *Likkutei Torah, Emor* 36a ff. *Shir HaShirim* 24c and other references.)

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ver, Avos actually begins, not with directives of how to prepare for Mattan Torah, but rather with Mattan Torah itself: “Moses received⁷ the Torah at Sinai,” followed by the chain of tradition, as the Torah was transmitted from one generation to the other. This compels to conclude that the study of Avos focuses not only on how to prepare for the giving of the Torah, but actually contains within it a potential aspect of the actual receiving of the Torah.

⁷ Indeed, the terminology employed here is: “Moses received,” in the past tense, suggesting that we are in a state of having already received the Torah. To be sure, relative to this year’s revelation of *Mattan Torah* (Giving of the Torah), we are still in the **pre-Mattan Torah** mode. We therefore need to refine our nature (by Counting of the Omer and the study of tractate Avos), to make us receptive to the revelation of this year’s Mattan Torah. The above concept is even more pronounced in light of the well-known exposition that Mattan Torah actually innovated the entire concept of the synthesis between the “upper” spiritual realms and the “lower” physical realm (*Tanchuma*, *Va’eira* 15. *Shemos Rabbah* 12:3 and other sources).

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The question thus is: Why, immediately following Passover, do we focus our attention—when commencing the study of Avos—on the process of receiving the Torah and the preparations for it? Should not our study of Avos right after Passover be primarily a continuation of the Passover festival? Why then is the emphasis placed on the preparation for *Mattan Torah*?

The Soul of the Exodus

The Exodus from Egypt that we celebrate on Passover was not an end. It was a prelude to *Mattan Torah*. Thus the Torah states: “When you shall take this nation out of Egypt they will serve G-d on this mountain.”⁸

Before G-d gave and before the Jewish nation received the Torah there had to be the Exodus from Egypt, because this liberation came as a result of a Divine revelation that empowered us: “The supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, revealed Himself to them—in His essence and glory—and re-

⁸ *Shemos* 3:12.

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deemed them.”⁹ In Chassidic parlance this is known as an *Isarusa d’l’eila*, the “the effusion of an independent arousal from Above.”¹⁰

The G-dly revelation introduced during Passover, empowered us to respond by “Counting the Omer” with its spiritual connotation of self-refinement.¹¹ By virtue of our own efforts at self-refinement—involving all of the 49 attributes and characteristics, we can then be receptive to the revelation from above that

⁹ *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, s.v. *Matzah zu* and s.v. *Vayotzi’einu*.

¹⁰ See *Likkutei Torah*, *Vayikra* 1c. *Shir Hashirim*, 24c. [There are generally two forms Divine forces are generated into this world. The first is when G-d, initiates a spiritual awakening in the world. The second is G-d’s response to an awakening that we initiate. The Rebbe is explaining that if we were not first “jolted” by the spiritual awakening that occurred during Passover because of G-d’s initiative, we would not have done anything meaningful to prepare for the receiving of the Torah. – Translator’s note.]

¹¹ [This response that involves our *initiative* and effort at self-refinement is known as: *isarusa d’lisata*, an arousal from below. – Translator’s note.]

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occurred on the 50th day—the day on which G-d gave us the Torah. What this entailed was that in addition to the elicitation of 49 “gates of holiness,”¹² we could access even the most sublime and transcendent level that is referred to as the “fiftieth gate.”¹³ Indeed, we can even access the aspect of G-d that defies any and all categorization, level or modality.

The fact that this revelation from above comes after our **own efforts** during the days of *Sefirah*-(Counting) assures us that whatever

¹² [The Talmud states that “fifty gates of holiness were introduced to the world,” Moses was only able to fathom forty-nine of these gates. This suggests that there is something transcendent about the fiftieth gate and cannot be accessed by anyone, including Moses, with their own initiative, and must therefore be revealed to us by G-d Himself. That He does on Shavuos. – Translator’s note.]

¹³ See at length *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, 12a ff. There it is explained how there are actually two levels within the “fiftieth gate.” The first and lower level is within range of the 49 levels, whereas the higher level is completely above and beyond the 49 levels. Both of these levels are generated on Shavuos.

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er it is that is revealed on Shavuos, can be internalized and integrated within our own personalities.¹⁴

If we trace the spiritual dynamic of *Mattan Torah* (and its concomitant revelation of the “Fiftieth Portal”) back to its genesis,¹⁵ it is clear that it began with the initial revelation of “the Holy One blessed is He” during Passover. For it was this initial awakening from

¹⁴ [The Rebbe is responding to the obvious question: If we cannot on our own access these sublime revelations, why do we need the preparation before Shavuos? The answer is that our preparation enables us to internalize that which is given to us. – Translator’s note.]

¹⁵ Whereas—“down below”—in our finite experience, a potential state lacks actualization, in the spiritual realms—“above”—potential does not lack actualization. (See *Pardes*, Portal 11, Chapter 3, cited and expounded on in *Sefer Hamitzvos* of the *Tzemach Tzedek*, *Mitzvas He’emanas Elokus*, Chapter 11. *Hemshech* 5666, p. 5ff. 139 ff. S.v. *Shuva* and *V’lakachtem* 5671.) [Thus, from G-d’s vantage point all of the revelations that are elicited on Shavuos are actually present—in their entirety—during Passover, the time when the potential for these revelations originated – Translator’s note.]

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above that inspired us to engage in self-refinement, which, in turn, led to *Mattan Torah*.

In effect, the revelation of Shavuot, essentially, already existed during Passover. The difference being that when this Divine energy was generated on Passover, it was only of a temporary and fleeting duration insofar as the recipients were concerned. To be capable of making this revelation permanent by internalizing it required a step-by-step effort—albeit aided by the inspiration of the initial Divine revelation from Above. Finally, when G-d actually gave the Torah to the Jewish people, the initial revelation of the Exodus (the revelation of “The Supreme King of kings, the Holy One Blessed is he, in his own honor and glory”) was made permanently and inwardly manifest down here below.¹⁶

In this post Mattan Torah era, this revelation that exists in potentia during Passover is even more obvious. In the present day and age one

¹⁶ In addition, the revelation of Mattan Torah is truly of a more sublime nature than that of the Exodus.

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can gain access to the revelation of Mattan Torah even during Passover.^{17 18}

¹⁷ This concept is analogous to the spiritual dimension of eating Matzah. [There were two levels of eating Matzah on the night of the Exodus: The Matzah that was eaten before mid-night and the Matzah that was to be eaten after mid-night, when the revelation first occurred. The latter was of a much higher spiritual nature.] Despite the fact that we now eat Matzah before mid-night, nevertheless, because we are living in a post-Mattan Torah era, our pre-mid-night Matzah enjoys the same exalted status of the revelation of the “Supreme King of Kings etc.” that was originally generated after mid-night. In truth, it even goes beyond that because this revelation that is generated by the Matzah we eat subsequent to Mattan Torah, is enhanced by virtue of the observance of Torah and Mitzvos throughout the year, before Passover. See s.v. *Matzah zu*, 5749 for a lengthy exposition on this matter, and see there for cross-references.

¹⁸ Although, relative to Mattan Torah of each new year, it is regarded as being before Mattan Torah, as stated above n. 7.

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Where it All Begins

We can now appreciate why we learn Pirkei Avos in each of the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot, and why we commence that study—on the very first Sabbath after Passover—with “Moses received the Torah at Sinai etc.”

No sooner that one enters into Passover, one already possesses the potential for and the means to realize all that will follow until and including the revelation of “Moses received the Torah at Sinai”—*Mattan Torah*. This is particularly true on the first Sabbath following Passover, for the Sabbath is an extension of the preceding days. The Sabbath is when all of the preceding days are elevated and assume a higher character.¹⁹

One therefore studies Avos—with its opening reference to Moses receiving the Torah at Sinai—during the very first Sabbath that fol-

¹⁹ This perfection and enhancement that the preceding days attain on the Sabbath is expressed by the word(s): “*Va’yechulu* (And he completed)”. (Genesis 2:1. See *Or Hatorah* on this verse (P. 42b ff. *Chukas* 508a ff., and other sources.)

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lows Passover (despite the fact that the actual revelation of Mattan Torah will not happen until after the forty-nine days of counting), because that is when the revelation of Mattan Torah really begins.²⁰ Realizing that we already have the potential for this matter and even its beginning, equips us with the knowledge of what is incumbent upon us during the days of *Sefirah*, to elicit the process of the giving of the Torah (“Moses received the Torah at Sinai”) from its potential state to actuality.

However, to help manifest this openly, one must first learn about “ethics and morality”

²⁰ See also *Chasam Sofer* on tractate *Pesachim* (at the end) and in his commentary to the *Shulchan Aruch* (end of sec. 430:5) where he states how from the Exodus from Egypt the process of Mattan Torah began, in reference to which it is stated: “There he placed for him a statute and a judgment,” and “This is the month for you” which is the first Mitzvah...We therefore engage in the study of Avos during this period because it provides us with the chain of tradition from Moses, peace be unto him, as well as the protective fences that surround the Torah and the custom of those who engage in its study and its honor.

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and implement these teachings into practice, which is what *Sefiras Ha'omer*"—Counting of the Omer is all about.

A New dimension of Torah

To translate the above concept—i.e., that the process of *Mattan Torah* is there in potentia and has already begun—into practice: When we speak of the study of *Avos* as a preparation for *Mattan Torah*, it is not only because it refines our nature, but primarily because it constitutes a new dimension of Torah study²¹ that was introduced when "Moses received the Torah from Sinai." This includes Torah *Shebiksav* and Torah *Sheb'al Peh*, the Written and Oral Torah, as Rambam writes: "All of the commandments that were given to Moses at Sinai were given with their commentary."²²

²¹ Obviously this new dimension of Torah study includes the actual study of Pirkei Avos, one of the tractates that contain teachings of Torah *Sheb'al Peh*, the Oral Torah.

²² Beginning of his introduction to his *Yad* as well as in the introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah. There he adds: "He [G-d] would

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Thus, the statement that “Moses received the Torah from Sinai” refers to both the Written Torah as well as the Oral Torah, which he received simultaneously with the Written Torah.²³ And the practical application of the

first state the Mitzvah to him [Moses] and then He would tell him what it meant and its idea.”

Rambam cites (Exodus 24:12): “And I shall give you the tablets of stone, the Torah and the commandments.” Rambam comments: “[The word] Torah refers to the Written Torah. Mitzvah refers to its commentary. He thus commanded us to fulfill the Torah according to its commentary. This term Mitzvah refers to the Oral Torah.”

²³ This can be adduced also from the words of the Midrash (Midrash *Tehillim* 19:3. See *Pirkei d’R. Eliezer* Chapter 46. See *Or HaTorah (Yahel Or)* *ibid.* sec. 3, end of p. 61): “Concerning Moses our Teacher it is written (Exodus 34:28): ‘And he was there with G-d forty days and forty nights... When the Holy One, Blessed is He taught him Torah he knew that it was day, when he taught him Mishnah he knew that it was night.’ Thus it is clear that during his very first night (of the forty days and forty nights) of his stay on Mount Sinai he learned Mishnah (the Oral Torah). On the very next day, he continued to learn the

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study of these words and the entire tractate is the need to introduce a new dimension of Torah study on the very first Sabbath that follows Passover- the time that the process of Sinai actually commences.²⁴

Written Torah. It should be noted that the language employed by Rambam implies that the commentary was said after each and every statement. He did not have to wait until that night. This matter requires further research. It is noteworthy that the Midrash *Shmuel* ibid states that the “*mem*” of the word *MiSinai* (“from Sinai”) alludes to the 40 days that Moses was on the mountain to receive the Torah (since the letter “*mem*” is numerically equivalent to the number 40).

²⁴ Adapted from *Sefer HaSichos*, 5749, volume 2, p. 405ff.

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ESSAY THREE
SABBATICAL ETHICS

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ESSAY THREE

SABBATICAL ETHICS

The Shabbos Connection I

The universal custom is to recite and study Pirkei Avos on the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot, while others continue to recite it throughout the Sabbath of the summer. The common denominator of all the customs is that it is recited only on Shabbos.¹

The question arises, while one can certainly recite and study it any day of the week, why is the custom of reciting Pirkei Avos restricted to the Sabbath.

According to the first reason of reciting Avos as a preparation for the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, cited in the preceding essay, one can say that there is an intrinsic connection between Torah and the Sabbath. There is a

¹ [See preceding essays for sources for these customs. –Translator's note.]

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dispute in the Talmud² as to which day of the month the Torah was given. However, the Talmud continues, “There is unanimous consent that the Torah was given on Shabbos.”³ And indeed, Avos begins with the statement: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai,” an event that occurred on Shabbos. (Moreover, according to the Rambam,⁴ Avos was composed specifically for rabbinic judges. Inasmuch as every Torah scholar is referred to as Shabbos,⁵ certainly the judges, the elite

² *Shabbost* 86b.

³ Cf. Commentary of *Radal* to *Pirkei d’R. Eliezer* 46:l. Commentary *Seder Zmanim* on *Seder Olam* 5:25 where a dissenting view is cited. However, the Talmud there, when it says, “There is unanimous consent” refers exclusively to the two opinions concerning the day of the month in which the giving of the Torah occurred. They both agree that it was given on the Sabbath. This does not preclude the existence of other views in other texts.

⁴ Introduction of Rambam to his Commentary on the Mishnah, s.v. *v’hacheilek hashishi*. Obviously, Avos was written for everyone, but there is a particular emphasis in it for judges.

⁵ *Zohar* III: 29a.

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among the Torah scholars, are deserving of that title.⁶ By reading it on Shabbos we high-

⁶ One can see a connection between Avos and Shabbos reflected in the concluding sayings of Avos as well. The very last Mishnah of the last chapter (Chapter five) ends (in some versions of Pirkei Avos) with the statement: “Commensurate with the painstaking effort is the reward.” This is reminiscent of the dictum: “Whoever toils on the eve of the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath” (*Avodah Zarah* 3a). The very last Mishnah of the *Beraisa* appended to Avos (its sixth chapter, known as *Kinyan Torah*) concludes with: “All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He created it solely for His glory, as it ‘All that is called by My name, indeed, it is for My glory that I have created it, formed it, and made it’; and it says: ‘The L-rd shall reign forever and ever.’” This too alludes to the Sabbath because it is the day when one is situated in the private and exclusive domain of the “One G-d.” During the week, one is situated in the public domain, literally and figuratively, whereas, on Shabbos, where all work is restricted, one must proceed inside one’s home and into a “one G-d” mindset. From the talks of *Motza’ei Shabbos Parshas Beshallah*, 5739. See also *Midrash Shmuel* ad loc. where he connects that verse to the future

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light its relevance of Avos to those people who are called Shabbos).

Having established the existence of a connection between Avos (Torah) and Shabbos, a follow-up question is in order, why **was** the Torah given specifically on Shabbos? There must obviously be a conceptual relationship between Torah and Shabbos.

To understand this relationship it is first necessary to appreciate what precisely was accomplished when the Torah was given at Sinai. We know that Torah was studied even before the revelation at Sinai. The Patriarchs all studied Torah,⁷ and even the Jews in Egypt had a “House of Study” that was established by Judah, Jacob’s son, before Jacob descended to Egypt.⁸ Likewise, the Patriarchs observed the commandments.⁹ Abraham, for example, was famous for his hospitality. And he is

Messianic Age, a sample of which we experience every Shabbos.

⁷ *Yoma* 28b.

⁸ *Tanchuma* (Buber) and *Yalkut Shimoni* (cited by Rashi) on *Bereishis* 46:28.

⁹ *Bereishis* 26:5. See *Kiddushin* 82a.

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praised for his transmitting these practices to his progeny.¹⁰ What then was so revolutionary about the giving of the Torah at Sinai?

Chassidic thought answers that the difference between pre-Sinai and post-Sinai Torah is the effect it has on the world. Before Sinai, Torah inspired the person, but it did not change the world. At Sinai the barrier that G-d imposed previously that the spiritual and physical shall be separated was removed.¹¹ Hence, the entire world was given an opportunity through Torah and its commandments to make the world—in its entirety—a holy place.

This characteristic of Torah is most dramatically exemplified by Shabbos. Shabbat represents the ultimate paradox. On the one hand it is referred to as Shabbos *Kodesh*, the holy Sabbath.¹² The meaning of holiness is that it is apart, ultimate otherness.¹³ The Havdalah service describes the holiness of the Shabbos

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 8:19.

¹¹ *Shemos Rabbah* 12:3. *Tanchuma Va'eira* 15.

¹² *Shemos* 31:14.

¹³ See *Tanya* chapter 46, *Iggeres Hakodesh* sec. 17.

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in terms of it being separated from the rest of the week and equates the separation between the Sabbath and the weekdays to the separation between the holy and profane, light and darkness etc.

On the other hand, it is mandated that we observe Shabbos with joy and delight. Shabbat itself has been designated as a day of delight, even in the physical sense.¹⁴ It is thus imperative that we enjoy the Shabbat by eating gourmet food – “fat meat and aged wine.” Sleeping on Shabbat is also considered a delight.¹⁵

To reconcile the two characteristics of Shabbos—its otherness and its physical delight, we must conclude that on the Sabbath even our eating and sleeping are transformed into something holy.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Yeshayahu* 58:13.

¹⁵ *Shulchan Aruch, Admur Hazaken, Orach Chaim*, #242:2. *Siddur Kol Ya'akov*.

¹⁶ See *Torah Or*, beginning of *parshas Chayei Sarah* (15c). Discourse s.v. *V'hu omed* 5663. *Likutei Sichos*, volume 3, p.796.

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And this is what the giving of the Torah at Sinai accomplished: All of what we do shall ultimately become transformed into holiness. This explains why we find such an intertwining between the theme of Torah at Sinai and the Sabbath. It therefore fitting, that the recitation of Avos—which is a preparation for the giving of the Torah at Sinai—should be on the Sabbath, the very day that exemplifies the ideal and objective of Sinai.¹⁷

The Shabbos Connection II

According to the second reason mentioned earlier for the recitation of Pirkei Avot (to ensure that one's preoccupation with bodily health during the summer should not lead to a state of moral decay and a spirit of rebelliousness) we can also explain why the recitation of Pirkei Avot occurs specifically on the Shabbat.

As was noted earlier, Shabbat has been designated as a day of delight, even in the physical sense. This same behavior on any other

¹⁷ From the talks of *Shabbos Parsha Shelach* 5741. Based exclusively on the account of a listener.

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day besides Shabbat, would be characterized by the Biblical statement “and Israel became fat” that could lead to the conclusion of the verse: “and he rebelled.”

On the Shabbat, however, the indulgence in bodily pleasure is utilized for the positive purpose of capturing the spirit of Shabbat and channeling one’s enhanced pleasure into a more spirited and enjoyable approach to Judaism. And it is precisely through the enjoyment of the Shabbos through physical pleasure that ensures that one’s physical indulgence throughout the week should not lead one astray. Shabbat then becomes the inspiration to neutralize the spirit of rebelliousness that can occur during the weekdays.

No Vows on the Shabbos

A similar concept can be found in a law that allows for the annulment of vows on the Sabbath.¹⁸

¹⁸ Shabbos 157a. [A vow is an instrument the Torah provides for one who wishes to impose a prohibition of a particular behavior on oneself. Generally speaking the Torah does not approve of people adding restrictions that the Torah does

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A vow is typically the means a person uses to control his natural desires to indulge. In Kabbalistic and Chassidic parlance, a vow derives from the faculty of *binah* (understanding) of one's soul. *Binah* is the “mother” of the emotions and is intimately connected to them. The source of *binah* of the soul is the

not call for. However, when a person sees that his own conscious defenses against excessive indulgence is wanting, the Torah provides for the mechanism of a vow, whereby the person who makes the vow is forbidden by Torah law to violate that which one vowed not to do. The Torah also provides a mechanism to have the vows annulled. Generally it is done through three rabbis who serve as judges and determine whether the person would have made the vow had he known its consequences. The Talmud states that one may annul a vow even on the Sabbath. Chassidus however takes this law and finds a conceptual and mystical meaning to it that connects between annulment of a vow—which means that one is no longer in need of the special spiritual boost one receives from it—and the Sabbath, which likewise, provides for a natural boost to one's ability to not be fazed by and rise above the temptations and pitfalls that exist within the physical world. – Translators note.]

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divine attribute of *binah*, which is involved in the creation of the world and is, therefore, in tune with and intimately connected to the world. Likewise, within the structure of the soul, when one's *binah* is dominant, they are intimately involved with and affected by their "world" of emotions. From the vantage point of *binah* one can easily be influenced by the world and its pleasures, since it is this power that allows for the generation of the world—macrocosm or microcosm. Hence the need for a vow—that instills the power of *binah*—to gain mastery over one's natural inclination to indulge.

Annulment of a vow, we are taught in Chasidic literature derives from the higher soul-power of *chochma* (the power to conceptualize); a level that is so laden with the soul's essential force and so close to the soul proper that it is "beyond the world." And it is therefore beyond the danger of being adversely affected by the world. When the power of *chochma* is elicited it allows for a healthy separation from worldly influences. Hence a person who enjoys the inspiration of *chochma* need not worry about indulging because they can be involved in the world and aloof from it simultaneously.

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We can now appreciate the deeper meaning of the law, “one can annul vows on the Sabbath.” The Sabbath, which is connected to the soul-attribute of *chochma*, is capable of neutralizing the negative effects that occurs when one is involved with physical pleasure. Even one who was in need of the vow during the week is no longer in need of it on the Sabbath. Indeed, enjoying the Sabbath is not only permissible; it becomes a Mitzvah, an outright obligation.

In this light, Shabbos is more than just a day when physical enjoyment is a positive experience; it is the day that evokes the soul’s power to channel our physical pleasure in the right direction, not only on Shabbos itself, but also throughout the entire week.

We can now better appreciate the reason for reciting Pirkei Avos on Shabbos specifically, because both the Shabbat and Pirkei Avot share the capacity to prevent the desensitization process that occurs routinely during the ordinary days of the week and particularly during the summer months when our en-

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gagement with the world of our body is heightened.¹⁹

¹⁹ From the talk of *Shabbat Parshat Naso*, 5737. Based exclusively on a listener's account, and *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 4, p. 1070.

ESSAY FOUR
ATTRIBUTES OF THE
SOUL

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ESSAY FOUR

ATTRIBUTES OF THE SOUL

Six Chapters, Six Divine Attributes

Pirkei Avos essentially comprises **five** chapters. Chapter number **six**, which is in actuality a *Beraisa*,¹ was added as an appendix to Avos. The Holiday of Shavuot, which received

¹ [A *Beraisa* is a statement authored by the rabbis of the Tanaitic period that culminated with the redaction of the *Mishnah* by R. *Yehudah HaNassi*. Many of the teachings of these Sages were not included in the *Mishnah*, due to R. *Yehudah*'s insistence that the *Mishnah* contain only the highlights of Jewish law. All the “extraneous” (hence the name *Beraisa*, which means “outside”) material thus, was deleted from the *Mishnah*, but compiled in separate works by his disciples, particularly the *Tosephta* by R. *Chiya* and R. *Oshiya*. *Pirkei Avos*, while one of the sixty tracts of the *Mishnah* was augmented with an additional sixth chapter, which is not a *Mishnah* but a *Bereisa*. – Translator’s note.]

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its name from the Biblical phrase “seven weeks you shall count”² follows the six weeks of recitation of Pirkei Avos between the Holiday of Passover and Shavuot, at which time we are ready for the receiving of the Torah. Thus when surveying the numbers associated with Avos one notices the three numbers of five, six and seven playing a prominent role.

One can explain the significance of the numbers five, six and seven as they pertain to Pirkei Avos, in light of the fact that the six chapters of Pirkei Avos correspond to the six emotional attributes: *Chesed* (Kindness, love), *gevurah* (severity, judgment, awe), *tiferet* (beauty, harmony, compassion), *netzach* (victory, competitiveness, tenacity) *hod* (splendor, submission, gratitude) and *Yesod* (foundation, channeling, commitment) as will be explained below. There are, however, three ways of enumerating these attributes. As the Zohar states: “there are five, there are six and there are seven.”³

That the attributes are associated with the number five is due to the fact that of all the

² *Vayikra*

³ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 254a.

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seven attributes, only the first five are regarded as the essential ones. They include the attributes of *chesed* through *hod*. When one views the basic structure of the attributes they consist of the first five. And this is the derivation of the “fifty gates of *binah* (understanding),” discussed in the Talmud:⁴ When we take these five attributes and view them through all their permutations (as each of the five is made up of an element of one of the total ten Attributes,⁵ we arrive at the number fifty.

⁴ *Rosh Hashanah* 21b.

⁵ [The ten attributes refer to the seven discussed here, which are essentially emotional powers, and the three intellectual faculties and attributes: *chochma*, *binah* and *da’as*. When one looks at any of the attributes they can be view in a general way as being one attribute, or they can be viewed as being predominantly one attribute but also containing various admixtures of the other nine. Thus we can have *chessed*, kindness in it purist form and we can have *chessed* with a tinge of *chochma* or any of the other attributes. Thus the total number of attributes that emerge from the basic five is 50. – Translator’s note.]

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The number six is applied to the attributes when they are counted together with *yesod*, which is “outside the body,” and is not regarded as one of the essential attributes. Rather, *yesod* forms the **channel** through which the other five attributes are introduced into the seventh attribute of *malchus*.⁶ After King David enumerates the five basic G-dly attributes he concludes: “For **all** in heaven and earth [are Yours]” The Zohar translates this verse by substituting the phrase “that which unites” as a translation of the word *kol* instead of “all.” Now the verse reads: “for that which unites heaven and earth.” Heaven and

⁶ [Human anatomy and the process of reproduction is employed frequently in Kabbalah as a metaphor to describe the relationship of the five basic attributes to the sixth and seventh. The five are representative of the “two arms” and “two legs” and the “torso” (the head is representative of the three intellectual attributes, which serve as the source for the lower emotional ones.). All of these features are channeled through the reproductive organ (*yesod*) into the womb (*malchus*). The reproductive organs, which are responsible for generation of life parallel the attributes of *yesod* and *malchus*, sixth and seventh attributes, respectively. Translator’s note.]

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earth in this verse refer to the five upper attributes (heaven) and the lower attribute of *malchus* (earth). It is the attribute of *yesod* that channels the upper effluences to the lower.

Now the word “all” in Hebrew, which the Zohar translates as “that which unites” is *kol*, which has the numerical equivalent of fifty, alluding to the fifty specific forces (10 x 5) that are channeled through *yesod* into *malchus*.

The number seven thus applies to the attributes when they are joined (through *yesod*) with *malchus*, whose function it is to receive and then channel the energy of the upper six attributes to the outside world.

Accordingly, the six chapters of Pirkei Avos can be said to correspond to each of the six attributes and the Holiday of Shavuot is associated with the seventh attribute of *malchus*, which contains all of the energies of the higher attributes. In other words, through the recitation of the six chapters of Pirkei Avos, one elicits the full spectrum of one’s soul’s spiritual powers that prepare one for the reception and internalization of the Torah at Shavuot.

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First Three Chapters: *Chessed*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferes*

One can see the correspondence of each of the six chapters to the six attributes:

The first chapter corresponds to the attribute of *chessed*-kindness. This is reflected in both the beginning as well as the end of the chapter.

The chapter opens with: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai." That G-d gave His Torah, His "hidden treasure,"⁷ to mortal man is an act of unparalleled kindness. The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the virtue of peace. Peace and acts of loving-kindness are interrelated. Our Sages allude to this association in their comment on the verse: "Redeem my soul in peace."⁸ Our Sages observe that the notion of **peace** here refers to the study of Torah and acts of loving-kindness etc."⁹ As Rashi¹⁰ explains: "loving-kindness is also [an

⁷ Talmud, *Shabbos* 88b.

⁸ Psalms 55:19.

⁹ *Berachos* 8, beginning side a.

¹⁰ Ad loc.

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expression of] peace. For when one personally performs an act of kindness for his fellow, he recognizes that he is his friend. This leads to brotherhood and peace.”

(Since we are taught that in the realm of holiness all the attributes are incorporated within all the others, one can also find teachings in chapter one that relate to the opposing attribute of *gevurah*-judgment. *Chessed* comprises elements of *gevurah*, although *chessed* is the predominant attribute, and the predominant theme of chapter one of Pirkei Avos.).

Chapter two corresponds to the attribute of *gevurah*-judgment. As is the case with the first Chapter, suggestions of *gevurah* can be found in both the opening and closing remarks of the chapter. One of the first statements of the chapter read: “and you shall calculate the loss of a Mitzvah against its gain.” And another one is: “Know what is above you.” These statements summon us to be judgmental about our deeds and are motivated by the attribute of *gevurah*.. Similarly, at the end of the chapter, it is stated, “the day is short, there is much work, the workers are lazy... and the master is pressing.” This

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statement too is demanding and judgmental, expressive of the attribute of *gevurah*.

(There are, however, statements in Chapter two that are reflective of the attribute of *chessed*. This is because, as stated earlier, in matters of holiness each attribute incorporates elements of all the others. However, the dominant theme, reflected in the beginning and end of the chapter, is clearly *gevurah*.)

Chapter three corresponds to the third attribute of *tiferes*, beauty or harmony. This is alluded to in one of its opening statements, “Reflect on **three** things.” The number three alludes to the attribute of *tiferes*, because it is the third element that synthesizes the other two attributes of *chessed* and *gevurah*. This, then, is what is implied in the phrase “reflect on three things,” when one reflects on the attribute of *tiferes*, one perceives three things.

In truth, much of Avos is filled with sets of three teachings. This is so because all of Torah is associated with the number three. As the Talmud describes how G-d gave: “a three-fold Torah, to a three-fold nation, through [Moses] a third child [born after Miriam and Aaron] on the third day [of preparation] of

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the third month.”¹¹ Yet, nowhere is the number three as pronounced as it is in this chapter where it states emphatically “**Reflect** on three things.” Here the number three is a matter that we ought to pay extra attention to because this chapter is particularly partial to the number three as it is the chapter that corresponds to the third attribute of *tiferes*.¹²

¹¹ *Shabbos* 88a.

¹² [The Rebbe does not mention whether there is a connection between the concluding Mishnah and the attribute of *tiferes*. Perhaps, *tiferes* is alluded to in the word “*parpara’os*” (condiments) that is mentioned there. That word has all the letters of the word *tiferes* in a different arrangement. In addition, that Mishnah speaks of the “body of *Halacha*.” As noted earlier, the Zohar refers to *tiferes* as “the body” or “torso” in the configuration of the attributes. In addition, that Mishnah connects (synthesis or *tiferes*) the two distinct areas of Torah, the basic laws that pertain to impurity (*gevurah*) with the condiments to wisdom that can perhaps be related to *chessed*, as can be said to be figuratively sweet (a characteristic of *chessed*) - Translator’s note.]

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Last Three Chapters: *Netzach*, *Hod* and *Yesod*.

Chapter four corresponds to the attribute of *netzach*, victory or tenacity. The chapter opens with, “Who is a *chacham*-wise person?” This is an allusion to the attribute of *netzach*, which is an extension and final manifestation of the attribute of *chochma*, following the scheme in which the Ten Attributes are divided into three “directions” or modalities. It is well known that the right modality comprises: *chochma*-wisdom, *chesed*, kindness and *netzach*-victory.

This explains the import of the question, “Who is a wise person?” If the Mishnah were to be referring to the attribute of *chochma* itself, there is no sense in asking *chochma*, “who is a *chacham*?” However, now that we say that the Mishnah corresponds to the attribute of *netzach*, which simultaneously extends from *chochma*, but also obscures it, the question can be asked, “Who is a *Chacham*?” This can be interpreted to mean, where can one find the true expression of the attribute of *chochma*? And the answer is, in the attribute of *netzach*, because of the principle

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that “the beginning is wedged in the end.”¹³ Thus, the answer to the question “where does *chochma* truly manifest itself?” is: “in the attribute of *netzach*.”¹⁴

¹³ *Sefer Yetzirah*.

¹⁴ [This Kabbalistic explanation is also consistent with the Mishnah’s answer to the question: “He who learns from every person.” As the Rebbe states, *netzach* is an offshoot and outgrowth of *chochma*. When can one’s tenacity and desire to prevail be a positive trait? Only when one’s stubbornness is a product of one’s *chochma*. When the trait of stubbornness does not “learn from every person,” i.e. look for guidance from the higher attributes, particularly *chochma*, the highest of all the attributes, then *netzach* is not a desirable trait. As was mentioned in the preceding essay, *chochma* is the level of conceptual thought, where the ideas that emerge are still very much in an amorphous state, because they derive from and are still “under the influence” of the soul that transcends articulation. When one’s attribute of *netzach* is connected to *chochma*, i.e., when one’s stubbornness is an expression of the soul’s true feelings, not obscured by intellectualism and other influences, that is where *chochma* is truly expressed because it has manifested itself in the most basic aspect of one’s be-

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With the foregoing analysis that chapters three and four correspond to the Divine attributes of *tiferet*-beauty and *netzach*-victory, respectively, we can shed light on the difference in phraseology that we find in these two chapters:

In the beginning of Chapter three it is stated that in order to avoid sinning one should reflect on how we will be judged by G-d in the future. The Mishnah thus states that we should reflect on: “before whom you will give a judgment and an accounting, before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed is He.” Compare this to a similar statement at the end of chapter four: “against your will you will give judgment and an accounting before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed is He.”

havior. One is prepared to act defiantly and tenaciously until they prevail. A person whose trait of *netzach* is unadulterated with no connection to his *chochma* will be the least likely candidate to accept what others say. Only when the *netzach* is expressive of and tempered by the humbling atmosphere of *chochma* will the otherwise obstinate person be receptive to others. – Translator’s note.]

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In light of chapter three's objective of providing us with a meditation that would dissuade us from sinning, it would have been fitting to include the strongly worded statement: "against your will," in the notice that we will be judged by G-d. Wouldn't the knowledge that we have no choice in the matter and no way of escaping the reality of being judged by G-d, contribute to a more sober view of sin? Why then does chapter three omit the reference to the fact that judgment will be made against our will, while it is included in chapter four?

With the foregoing premise, that chapter three corresponds to the Divine attribute of *tiferes*, the question can be answered. The attribute of *tiferes* represents the ultimate expression of divine light. (This is so, because of the unique position that *tiferes* occupies within the three modalities, into which all the Ten Attributes are divided, right, left and center. *Tiferes* is associated with the center, and in Kabbalah we are taught that only the middle line rises above the Ten Attributes, to the level of *keser*-the Crown.). "Chapter three," which represents this great revelation, negates the need to serve G-d with compulsion and coercion. In the environment of

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tiferes, the mere knowledge that we can be judged, even if it were not inevitable, would suffice to keep us away from sin.

Netzach-victory, by definition, represents a state of concealed G-dly light, because the fact that one is victorious implies that there are adversaries that necessitate eliciting the attribute of *netzach*-victory, to overcome them. When one serves G-d, utilizing the attribute of *netzach* of his soul, it implies that one does not have the ability to reach G-d through the power of his intellect. It also suggests that one's emotions of love and reverence are likewise dormant. One must evoke the faculty of victory to overcome the adversaries to G-d's will. From this vantage point one must be apprised of the inevitability of G-d's judgment.¹⁵

¹⁵ [Here too, the concept of *netzach* is alluded to in the end of the chapter, for the statement "against your will you will give judgment.." appears at the very end of Chapter four. Translator's note.]

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Chapter five corresponds to the attribute of *hod*-splendor, submission or devotion.¹⁶

¹⁶ [The connection between the attribute of *hod* and chapter five was not explained in the Rebbe's original discourse. Perhaps, one may suggest that Chapter five discusses the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in several places. Mishnah 5 details the ten miracles that transpired in the *Bais Hamikdash*-the Holy Temple. Likewise, Mishnah 20 concludes with a prayer for the speedy rebuilding of the *Bais Hamikdash*. The Talmud (*Berachos* 58a) declares that *hod* refers to the *Bais Hamikdash*. Perhaps, also, Mishnah 20 (immediately before it prays for the restoration of the *Bais Hamikdash*) deplores the brazen individual and hails the modest. Brazenness derives from *netzach*, while modesty is associated with *hod*. This could explain why the prayer for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple follows the statement about brazenness and modesty, because the Temple that is associated with *hod* will instill the feeling of modesty and temper the brazenness. Furthermore, Mishnah 20 is authored by *Yehudah ben Teima*. The name *Yehudah*, is etymologically linked to *hoda'ah*, or submissive acknowledgment—the attribute of *Hod*. In addition, the sage mentioned last in this chapter is *Ben Hei Hei*. The letter *hei* denotes the number

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Chapter six corresponds to the attribute of *yesod*—foundation, channeling or commitment. Thus, this chapter is not an integral part of the Pirkei Avos, but it is a *Beraisa* that is considered to be “outside of the body” or an appendix to the primary body of the Mishnah. This is analogous to the attribute of *yesod*, which is the channel or conduit of the other attributes into the realm of *malchus*.¹⁷

five and *hod*, which also begins with a *hei*, is the fifth attribute. – Translator’s note.]

¹⁷ [In this talk, the Rebbe did not explicitly cite the connection of the beginning and end of Chapter six to the attribute of *yesod*. One might suggest that it is implicit at the beginning, which refers to the style of the *Beraisa* that is analogous to the Mishnah. This is precisely the role of *yesod*, which while distinct from the Mishnah, contains nothing essentially that is not implicit in the Mishnah. Likewise the end of the chapter states: “all that was created was created for His glory.” The word *all-kol* has been interpreted by the Zohar (see above) as a reference to *yesod*. Furthermore, the Mishnah concludes with the verse: “G-d will reign forever and ever.” This can be seen as an allusion to how the six attributes—including *yesod*, represented by Chapter six—ultimately leads to the attribute of *malchus*,

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It is not an integral attribute, just as chapter six of Pirkei Avos is not an integral part of the Mishnah,¹⁸ but nevertheless it is connected to it, just as *yesod* is connected to the upper five attributes.

G-d's eternal and exclusive reign over the entire world. – Translator's note.]

¹⁸ Adapted from the talk of *Shabbat Parshat Teitzei, Tavo 5741*. Based exclusively on a listener's account.

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ESSAY FIVE
PREPARATION
FOR SHAVUOS

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ESSAY FIVE

PREPARATION FOR SHAVUOS

Refinement

One of the reasons for reciting Pirkei Avos between Passover and Shavuos is to provide us with a means to prepare for the giving of the Torah during the Festival of Shavuos. By learning the instructions contained in this tractate that is devoted to “ethics and [refinement] of character,”¹ one becomes ready to receive the Torah anew during Shavuos.²

¹ Commentary of R. *Ovadya Bartinura*, beginning of Avos.

² Introduction to *Midrash Shmuel*: “They instituted its study before Shavuot so that the heart of every Jew is prepared to receive the Torah

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The process of refinement through Pirkei Avos parallels the ritual that is performed in the days between Passover and Shavuot, known as *Sefiras Haomer*-Counting the days from Passover to Shavuot. However, it is well known that *Sefirah* is not simply an exercise in counting days; in addition to it being a fulfillment of a Biblical command, it constitutes a process of self-refinement that is a prerequisite to the receiving of the Torah.³

By drawing this parallel between learning Avos and counting the days, we are highlighting the nature of the refinement process, for there are two approaches to the refinement of character. The first is through the teachings of the Torah that comes directly from Above. This includes all the teachings of the Written Torah that were transmitted directly from G-d.

The second approach is the refinement process that comes from “below,” from human initiative. And even where the initiative is driven by the words of the Oral Torah, of

with a complete heart.” See also Essays one and two.

³ See *Likkutei Torah, Emor* 35b.

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which the moral lessons of Pirkei Avos are a prime example, nevertheless, these lessons are part of the Oral Torah that came to us through the *Tanaim*. Relative to the Written Torah, the teachings of the Oral Torah are considered to have come from “below.”⁴

Not only is Avos a part of the Oral Torah—which is characterized by its human involvement—it subject matter is not standard Halacha, but “words of extra piety,”⁵ instructions that originate in rabbinic legislation and enactments that were superimposed on the Biblical commandments.

And the role of the **rabbis** in bringing about self-refinement is further underscored in a teaching found the very first Mishnah of Avos: “And make a fence around the Torah.” This demands that in addition to the direc-

⁴ [One of the prerequisites of teaching Torah is that the ideas that are taught, notwithstanding their divine origin and notwithstanding the way the *Tanaim* were divinely inspired, the ideas that they teach as part of Torah must go through their intellect. See *Bava Metzia* 58b. – Translator’s note.]

⁵ See *Bava Kamma* 30a.

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tives of the Torah that come from above, it is imperative that the Sages themselves should create innovated laws that serve as “fences,” or precautionary measures, for the protection of the Torah. This type of legislation can be described as “coming from below” because it is legislated by the Sages who take into consideration the characteristics of the animal soul within man. And they gauge the needs of each time and legislate accordingly.⁶

Why the Need for Rabbinic Legislation?

To understand the need for additional means of self-refinement beyond the teachings of the Torah itself that come from “below” such as Pirkei Avos, one must understand the very purpose of Torah. Torah is not just a set of rules that we are told to obey. Torah was given to us so that a state of peace and har-

⁶ See *Eiruvין* 6a: He found a valley (i.e., a wide-open expanse, a metaphor for unchecked behavior) and build a fence.” See there for cross-references. See also *Moed Katan* 5a: “create a guard, create a guard for the guard.”

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mony can prevail between the Creator and the created.⁷

In order for the Torah to have that effect, it was imperative that the Jewish people at that time go through a refinement process, otherwise they would prove to be resistant to the demands of the Torah and a spirit of dissonance would prevail between G-d and the world instead of harmony.

However, with the passage of time our receptivity to Torah has become dulled. The “animal soul’s” capacity to desensitize us to our spiritual needs has increased, and as a result it threatens our fidelity to the observance of the commandments. If left to its own devices, this situation would have deteriorated to the point where the very purpose of Torah to create a state of harmony between G-d and the world would be undermined..

The Torah therefore gave authority to the Sages of each generation to gauge the specific condition of their generation and legislate new laws and enact new enactments to deal with any of the problems that could arise. To be sure, this, they do according to the princi-

⁷ See *Rambam*, end of *Hilchos Chanukah*.

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ples laid down by the Torah itself. The objective of all these rabbinical enhancements of the Torah, including the teachings of Pirkei Avos, is to strengthen Judaism and bring about the desired state of harmony.⁸

To be sure, these specific enhancements were not mandated by the Torah itself—they are, after all “rabbinical enactments”—because in the days of Mattan Torah and the earlier generations Biblical commandments sufficed. One did not have a need to follow those rabbinical decrees because their level of observance was up to par. Nevertheless, and this is the novelty, the Torah (as it was given at Sinai) empowered the Sages to use their intelligence to evaluate the needs and levels of their generation, and legislate—utilizing the Torah’s principles—accordingly.

And while it may seem that the progression of time—that necessitated these extra-measures—brought about a regression of Jewish and spiritual standards, the opposite is true.

⁸ Most of these added enactments were introduced in those generations that followed the first Temple and beyond the second Temple era.

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Because of these needs, Torah itself was enhanced with additional teachings and the concomitant increase of light that comes out of darkness. Moreover, the added corrective measures that strengthen our observance of the Torah provided for us, is actually a demonstration of the love G-d has for us. The more a father loves a child—to cite an example—the more he will increase his protection of him.⁹

In effect, the fact that we have Pirkei Avos “added on”¹⁰ to the original teachings of the Torah is to afford us extra opportunities for self-refinement, and makes us more receptive to the Torah on Shavuot, which, in turn, facilitates the realizing of the Torah’s goal of creating a spirit of harmony in the cosmos. When we study Pirkei Avos in the weeks that lead up to Shavuot we should appreciate the incredible bounty that we were given. We

⁹ *Likkutei Torah* loc. Cit. *Hemshech* 5666, s.v. *V’yiten lecha* (p. 89) and other sources.

¹⁰ [Obviously, everything that is added on to the Torah was transmitted to Moses on Sinai. However, not until it was written down, was Avos revealed to us as a part of Torah. – Translator’s note.]

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should also realize that it is a manifestation of G-d's intense love for us.

ESSAY SIX
DUAL PREPARATIONS

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ESSAY SIX

DUAL PREPARATIONS

Two Customs

There are two customs concerning the recitation of Pirkei Avos: The first is to recite it every Shabbos between the Holidays of Passover and Shavuos. The alternate custom is to continue saying it throughout the Sabbaths of the summer up until Rosh Hashanah.

Rabbi *Schneur Zalman of Liadi*, known as the *Alter Rebbe* writes:¹

It is customary to recite² Chapters of the Fathers, a chapter each Sabbath, between Passover and Shavuos.³... Some have the custom

¹ [See Essay One n. 3 – Translator’s note.]

² [Ibid. n. 4. – Translator’s note.]

³ [Ibid. n. 6 – Translator’s note.].

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to continue this practice throughout all the Sabbaths of the summer.⁴

The simple reason for the custom of reciting Pirkei Avos is to serve as a preparation for the receiving of the Torah, which occurs on Shavuot.⁵ Our Sages state, “*Derech Eretz*—proper comportment and ethical behavior comes before the Torah.”⁶ Therefore, the recitation and study of Avos, which is devoted to the theme of character refinement and the acquisition of a good character, ought to precede the receiving of the Torah.⁷

⁴ [Ibid. n. 8 – Translator’s note.]

⁵ *Midrash Shmuel*, Introduction. See above, beginning of Essay one.

⁶ *Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3.

⁷ The fact that it is described as a custom and not a law can be understood in light of the fact that Pirkei Avos serves in place of the *Derech Eretz* that preceded the Torah. In other words, it is a “reenactment” of the pre-Sinai state of affairs, when the laws of the Torah were not yet in effect. When we study Pirkei Avos it is as if we return to that pre-Sinai era, and therefore we

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However, the second custom of reciting Pirkei Avos throughout the summer needs some clarification.

One explanation of this custom revolves around the second reason given by commentators as to why we recite Pirkei Avos,⁸ which focuses on the relevance of Pirkei Avos to the summer season. And this is alluded to in the words of the *Alter Rebbe*: “Some have the custom to continue this practice throughout all the Sabbaths of the **summer**.” The Alter Rebbe does not write “continue this practice until Rosh Hashanah,” or a similar expression. This supports the thesis that recitation of Avos relates to the extra challenge posed by the summer season.

The summer is a time when the world experiences renewal and the nature is at its peak. The trees blossom and one’s own bodily desires likewise are more pronounced. The beauty of nature that is apparent during the summer can distract one from his moral, re-

refer to the practice as a custom but not as a law, since no laws exist in the pre-Sinai mode.

⁸ *Midrash Shmuel*, ad loc. (“And I found written....”).

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ligious and spiritual responsibilities. As the Mishnah in Avos states: “One who is traveling and studies Torah and remarks, ‘How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!’ Scripture considers it as if he were guilty of a mortal sin.”⁹

The enhanced state of nature and natural forces both outside and inside of man during the summer months can even render one incapable of overcoming his bodily desires. In

⁹ Avos 3:7. [The Mishnah does not mean to suggest that there is a sin in observing the beauty of nature. On the contrary, the Torah tells us how one should “Lift your eyes heavenward and see who created these.” By observing nature one can realize the existence of a Creator, which, in turn will lead to love and awe of G-d. The Book of Psalms and our prayers are replete with references to the grandeur of nature and how it reflects on the greatness of its Creator. Rather, what is meant here is that one must not allow one’s engagement with nature to distract oneself from his primary obligations to follow the commandments. Hence, the Rebbe’s point, based on the *Midrash Shmuel’s* thesis, is that the potential for distraction is greater in the summer, not that there is something sinister about the beauty of nature. – Translator’s note.]

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short, we are more vulnerable in the summer than in the winter.

To deal with this summer phenomenon, the custom of reciting Pirkei Avos was developed. Pirkei Avos is devoted to refinement of character and sensitizes one to not only avoid causing damage, but also to go to the opposite extreme—to go beyond the dictates of the law.¹⁰

Because of the need to deal with the challenges of the summer months, it makes a lot of sense to continue reciting Avos throughout the summer Sabbaths, not only in the weeks preceding Shavuot. And once one recites Avos during all the summer Sabbaths, it

¹⁰ [See *Bava Kamma* 30a, where the Talmud provides several means to become a *chasid* (conscientious and pious). One of them is to study matters concerning damages and another is to study Avos. There is, however, a significant difference between the two courses of study. When one studies the laws of torts that will sensitize one to the need not to harm others, while the study of Avos elevates the person to the level where they go beyond the minimum requirements of the law. See Commentaries on the foregoing passage in *Bava Kamma*. – Translator's note]

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has the desired effect on the weekdays as well, in accordance with the principle that “from it [the Shabbos] all the days of the week [that follow] are blessed.”¹¹ This means that Shabbos has the ability to energize and inspire us for the entire week.

This thought is alluded to in the initials of the three weeks, throughout the summer when we begin reciting Avos anew. They are the weeks of *Naso*, *Pinchas* and *Shoftim*. The acronym for these three names is *nefesh*, which means soul.¹² This underscores the notion that the objective of saying Avos throughout the summer is to rectify and refine the soul.

However, there are other names by which the soul is identified, such as *ruach* and *neshoma*. The name *nefesh* is invoked here because it is representative of the lowest level of the soul. This is to teach us that even one whose soul is on the lowest level; is still capable of self-refinement through the recitation of Avos during the summer.

¹¹ *Zohar* II 63b; 88a.

¹² See *Bein Pesach l'Shavuot* (Israel, 5744) Chapter 5:32 for references.

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The Chabad custom is to continue reciting Avos throughout the summer. This custom is based on the fact that our Rebbe's have based their discourses in the summer on sayings from Avos that relate to that week. This does not prove that all the Rebbe's would always recite Avos all the Sabbaths of the summer. However, this has become the prevalent Chabad custom in recent years.

Preparing for the Torah After it was Given

When one analyzes the wording of the *Alter Rebbe's* instructions concerning the recitation of Avos there are two salient points that he makes:

First, that there are two levels or concepts concerning the recitation of Avos: (a) Every Sabbath between Passover and Shavuot; (b) Reciting Avos throughout the Sabbaths of the summer is restricted to "some."

To clarify these two points, we must realize that the need to recite Avos in the summer is not just to help us to overcome the greater temptations and pitfalls that exist in the summer. One can also appreciate the saying of Avos in the summer in the context of pre-

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paring for the receiving of the Torah, notwithstanding the fact that the “the Season of *Mattan Toraseinu*—the Giving of Our Torah” has already passed

In essence, the saying of Avos after Shavuot can be seen as a continuation of the saying of Avos before Shavuot, as a continued preparation for the receiving of the Torah.

This approach is based on the premise that one can experience a renewed Mattan Torah experience, which necessitates another series of preparation through the study of Avos. However, since there are multiple levels in this new dimension of Torah that one experiences after Shavuot, there is no uniform custom regarding the recitation of Pirkei Avos in the summer Sabbaths. Only “some” have this custom.

Our Sages have already established the existence of this renewed experience of Mattan Torah: “Everyday they shall be new in your eyes, as if you were commanded regarding them this very day.”¹³ Indeed, this concept we enunciate whenever we recite the blessings on the Torah, where we use the present

¹³ *Rashi, Devarim 26:16.*

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tense form “*Nosain HaTorah*, the Giver of the Torah,” not the past tense “who has given us the Torah.”¹⁴ And this ideal of viewing the Torah as a new experience is not just a lofty notion that does not relate to the practical world, it is the basis of the Talmud’s exhortation to us to study Torah with the same spirit and state of awe that accompanied the original giving of the Torah at Sinai: “Just as there [it was received] with fear and awe, trembling and perspiration, so too here [nowadays, Torah study should be permeated] with feelings of fear and awe, trembling and perspiration.” as if it one had just received it at Sinai that very day.

G-d Speaking Through Us

To better understand this renewed Torah experience, the *Alter Rebbe*¹⁵ prefaces the introductory verse to the Ten Commandments: “And G-d spoke all these words saying.” This verse will serve as a key to unlock the secret of the “renewed Torah” ideal.

¹⁴ *Likkutei Torah, Tazria* 23a. *Drushim l’sukos* 81c, and in several other sources.

¹⁵ *Torah Or, Yisro*, 67b.

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The *Alter Rebbe* raises the question concerning the usage of the word “*laimor*, which is usually translated as “saying:”

“At first glance, the word “saying” here is incomprehensible, and is unlike all other occurrences of this word. Elsewhere, the word “saying” is that G-d spoke to Moses, and then asked him to say it to all the other Jews [who did not hear it directly from G-d.] With respect to the Ten Commandments, however, this usage of “saying” cannot apply, since all of the Jewish people [were present at Sinai and] heard G-d’s commandments to them.”

The *Alter Rebbe* answers by presenting a novel way of interpreting the word “saying” in this context:

“The meaning of the word “saying” is to reiterate all the words of the Torah that were already spoken to Moses at Sinai...They are [truly] “My words that I have placed in your mouth.”¹⁶ This [word “saying” thus represents] the energy that was given to the Jewish people so that when the words of Halacha are uttered by them, these words are the actual words spoken by G-d to Moses at Sinai

¹⁶ *Yeshayahu* 59:21.

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at the time of the receiving of the Torah, when G-d gave the Ten Commandments.

When one says these words, he is essentially saying that which had already been said then. [To truly appreciate this one must be] in a state of total self-abnegation and surrender of one's being to Him, so that G-d's speech is not separate from the person's speech... it is as if they are his words. It is [the fulfillment of:] "my tongue responds to Your words,"¹⁷—that the Torah which are Your words, are uttered through my tongue, as if one was repeating the words of another..."

The *Alter Rebbe* concludes with the practical application of this mystical concept:

"The intellectual who contemplates this matter will be overcome with a sense of fear and dread when he studies Torah; when he takes to heart that [the words of Torah that he just uttered] are literally the words of G-d that were said to Moses at Sinai... {As the Talmud teaches:] "[just as there [it was received] with fear and awe... so too here [Torah study should be permeated] with [feelings of] fear and awe.... At first glance, how can there be

¹⁷ *Tehillim* 119:172.

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any comparison “Just like there...so too here...?” At the giving of the Torah at Sinai all of the people “saw the sounds” and “Face to face G-d spoke.” By contrast, when one studies Torah by himself he does not have these experiences.

However [the explanation of this matter is that]... when whoever studies Torah, in whichever time, it is literally the word of G-d that was said to Moses at Sinai [that is now being said]. With this [realization in mind] one will be overcome with a sense of fear and awe as if he had received it from Sinai that very day.”

To translate the above in simple terms it means that whenever a Jew studies Torah, he can have the same reaction of awe that accompanied the giving of the Torah. The fact that one does not see the thunder and lightning and the people around him trembling etc. does not faze the individual who realizes that he has experienced a phenomenon that is infinitely greater than the thunder and lightning. For one who has just experienced G-d’s very own words, uttered “face to face,” of what value is the thunder and lightning or the lack thereof?

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As for the argument that we do not feel these experiences every time we study Torah, there is a well-known parable of a coach driver whose horses draw a wagon with scholars on board, that addresses this dilemma. Does the fact that the horses are thinking of the hay and the coach driver is thinking of his pay, detract one iota from the value of the pearls of wisdom that the scholars are exchanging?¹⁸

It is therefore understandable that even after having received the Torah during the festival of Shavuot, “The Season of the giving of our Torah,” there can and must be a renewed experience of Mattan Torah. And if one needs to recite and study Avos before Shavuot as a preparation for the receiving of the Torah then, so too it is necessary to recite and study Avos after Shavuot to prepare for the new dimension of Torah that follows Shavuot.

¹⁸ *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5688, p. 201. *Sefer HaSichos*, 5701, p. 130.

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New Approaches to Torah Study

One can take the idea of Torah innovation a step further.

The Talmud relates how Rabbi *Zeira* moved from Babylonia to the Land of Israel. Before he embarked on his journey “he fasted a hundred (according to other versions: forty) fast days [to implore G-d] that he should forget the Babylonian Talmud.”¹⁹

This sounds rather strange in light of the law recorded in Avos that pronounces a harsh verdict for “One who [deliberately] forgets even one matter of his learning.”²⁰ How then could Rabbi Zeira make an effort to forget his Torah knowledge?

The question is magnified when we consider the means he utilized to the end of forgetting Torah. For a person to engage in fasting and other forms of needless deprivation is considered a sin.²¹ How can we justify Rabbi Zeira’s needless self-mortification—one hundred fasts—for a result that seems so negative?

¹⁹ See *Bava Metzia* 85a.

²⁰ Avos 3:8.

²¹ See *Ta’anis* 11a.

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The explanation of this enigma is that there is a difference between one who tries to forget words of Torah or forget an approach to the study of Torah. R. Zeira certainly did not to forget any of the words or laws of the Torah that he had learned in Babylonia.

What he did try to forget was the approach and style of learning that was popular in Babylonia so that he could learn a totally new and superior approach that was used in the Land of Israel. Babylonian scholars were known for their multitude of questions, debates, arguments and counter arguments. These arguments, rather than clarifying an issue, would actually cloud them. It was arduous process before they could reach a solid conclusion

In the Land of Israel, the approach to learning was straightforward, minimal amount of questions and arguments and counter arguments, because their approach was to see the subject clearly and not allow it to become obscured with a plethora of questions. Indeed, the Talmud itself applies the verse “He

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has placed me in the dark”²² as a reference to Babylonian style scholarship.²³

We now have a clearer picture of how one can master the Torah and yet still go through a process where they develop a radically new and higher level of understanding of Torah. Thus, even after one has received the Torah on Shavuot they are still capable of reaching a completely new level that calls for its own process of preparation. And just as it was crucial that one prepare for the initial receiving of the Torah on Shavuot by learning Pirkei Avos, it makes good sense to do the same when one wishes to acquire a new level of Torah study.

Ultior and Pure Motives

Another related application of the renewal aspect of Torah can be found in the Talmudic dictum: “One should always engage in the study of Torah, even if it is for ulterior mo-

²² *Eicha* 3:6. *Sanhedrin* 24a.

²³ *Shaarei Orah*, s.v., *Bchof hei bkislev*, Chapter 54ff. *Hemshech* 5666, p. 90 ff. *Sefer HaMaamarim*, 5708, p. 121ff

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tives, for from the ulterior motives one will come to [doing it] for pure motives.”²⁴

Upon reflection it is difficult to grasp how the Talmud could assure the person who studies Torah for ulterior motives that he will eventually study it for the pure motives? How could one be so sure? Doing things for ulterior motives ought to be considered undesirable and regarded as a inherently inferior form of learning that should be discouraged. At the very least, one should not be lead to think that is will inevitably lead to the higher form of learning.

However, the explanation of this matter is hinted to in the wording of that statement. The word “from [the ulterior motives],” is the key word. The Hebrew word of which “from” is a translation that is used here is “*mitoch*,” which can also be translated as “from within.” Let us now retranslate the entire sentence: “One should always engage in the study of Torah, even if it is for ulterior

²⁴ *Pesachim* 50b. See there for cross references. *Rambam, Hilchos Talmud Torah* Chapter 3:5. *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Chapter 10:5. *Hilchos Talmud Torah, Shulchan Aruch Admor Hazaken*, Chapter 43.

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motives, for **from within** the ulterior motives one will come to [doing it] for pure motives.”

What our Sages now seem to be saying is that despite the overt and conscious intentions one may have when they study Torah, when one probes beneath the surface and gets to the “*toch*” the inner core, the motive is indeed pure.

There is actually a twofold understanding of what is meant by the “inner core:” It is referring either to the core of the Torah or to the core of one’s soul. Either way, the core of Torah or of the soul is pure and will eventually help the person change their whole attitude towards Torah study.

Torah, no matter what circumstances it is in,²⁵ is always the word of G-d that is likened to fire²⁶ because: “Just as fire cannot be contaminated, so too words of Torah cannot be-

²⁵ Obviously this refers to one who does not distort the Torah, but follows its governing principles faithfully. This individual’s Torah itself will have a positive effect on him because the Torah is incorruptible.

²⁶ *Yirmiyahu* 23:29.

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come impure.”²⁷ And since the word of Torah cannot be tainted, there are empowered to refine the person and lead his to a point where his Torah study will be for the correct and pure motives.

And, likewise, the inner core of the Jew is pure, for the soul is “truly a part of G-d from above.”²⁸ And even when a person sins the soul is “faithful with Him.”²⁹

Thus, no matter what level one is at in terms of their motive for Torah study, the inner core of the Torah and their soul will lead

²⁷ *Berachos* 22a. *Rambam*, end of *Hilchos Kerias Shema*. The above is even more valid when the person’s involvement with Torah study is as a business, Note the word “*ya’asok*-engage in,” where the connotation is to be devoted to is study as an owner of a business is preoccupied and consumed with his business. See *Bach (Orach Chaim, Hilchos Birchas Hashachar, sec. 47, s.v. v’nuscha*. See also *Sefer HaMa’amarim Kuntreisim*, volume one, p. 258aff. *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5688, p. 112, 127. *Likkutei Sichos*, volume four, p. 1230ff).

²⁸ *Tanya*, Chapter 2.

²⁹ *Tanya*, Chapter 24 paraphrasing Esther 2:20.

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them inexorably to the learning of Torah with the purist of motives.

We can now better appreciate how one can have realized the receiving of the Torah during Shavuot and still will be able to experience anew the receiving of the Torah. It can either involve the realization that:

- (a) Every day, when we study Torah it is truly G-d giving us the Torah anew.
- (b) One can acquire totally new ways of approaching and understanding the Torah.
- (c) One can go from the level of learning Torah for ulterior motives to learning Torah for pure motives.

And we can now understand why Avos is recited and studied after Shavuot as well, because there are new vistas and dimensions of Torah study that arise after Shavuot, for which one needs the preparation that is provided for by Pirkei Avos.

What About the Winter?

At this point a simple question begs to be asked: If Torah has all these new dimensions, and if we must look for finding new vistas in

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Torah on a daily basis, throughout the entire life cycle as well as the entire yearly cycle, why do we not recite Pirkei Avos all year round?

One can offer the following explanation that, in essence, during the winter months we have a natural support system that can prepare us for our renewed vigor in Torah study, which is absent in the summer months. Thus during the winter we do not need the spiritual support provided by Pirkei Avos.

We can better understand the difference between summer and winter by analyzing the most salient feature that differentiates between summer and winter as they are described by the Torah.

The summer season in Hebrew is called *kayitz*,³⁰ and it refers to the drying of the fruits that occurs in the summer. This is in

³⁰ More specifically, The Torah actually records six seasons (*Bereishis* 8:22), each of which serves for two months (*Rashi* ad loc. citing *Bava Metzia* 106b). However, the two most contrasting seasons in a general sense are *kayitz* (summer) and *choref* (winter).

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direct contrast with the winter, which is called *yemos hageshamim*-the rainy season. And it is the absence of such rain in the summer that allows us to dry the fruits.

On a spiritual level, rain is associated with human endeavor. The Midrash³¹ commenting on the word *ya'arof*-pour in the verse "my teachings pour like rain,"³² states: "If the creatures break their stiff necks (the root of the word *ya'arof* is the same as *oref* which means nape of the neck) the rain shall descend immediately."

This concept echoes that of the Talmud that distinguishes between rain and dew. While dew is never withheld by G-d, and does not require that we make mention of it in our prayers to the same extent as rain, rain can be withheld, and we must therefore ask for it in our prayers.³³

In other words, when we look at the rain descending in the winter season it reminds us

³¹ *Bereishis Rabbah*, 13:14. See there for cross references.

³² *Devarim* 32:2.

³³ *Ta'anis* 3a.

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of our need to break our obstinate nature and resistance to Torah and reconnect to G-d.

And the dependency that exists between rain and our efforts is even more pronounced with regard to Torah study, as the Torah states, “If you will follow in My statutes... I will give the rains in their season.”³⁴ Rashi³⁵ takes this verse as a reference to toiling in the study of Torah. Hence Torah study and rain are clearly linked.

We can now understand the reason for the custom to recite Pirkei Avos throughout the Sabbaths of the summer and not of the winter. In the winter (“The rainy season”) there is a natural impetus that eliminates the negative form of a stiff-necked personality. There is therefore no need for the ethical and moral exhortations of Pirkei Avos to remove the impediments to Torah.

During the summer months, however, when the natural motivation that comes from the need for rain is absent, one needs the recitation of Pirkei Avos to secure a proper intro-

³⁴ *Vayikra* 26:3-4.

³⁵ *Ad loc.*

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duction to the new dimensions of Torah, for which one must always prepare.

Respect for Subjectivity

With this premise we can also understand why the custom of reciting Pirkei Avos is only a custom held by some, and not a universal custom, as the *Alter Rebbe* stresses in his introduction to Avos.

While everybody must prepare for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuos, the universal season for the giving of the Torah, the new dimensions of Torah that we receive on a daily basis are subjective. For some on the highest level, their preparation for the Torah after Shavuos is no different than their preparation before Shavuos because to them the Torah is new in the most literal and plain sense of the word.

Yet for others, the “new Torah” that they prepare for can only be described as **virtually** new and depending on the level of newness one’s preparations will vary.

These two general levels are reflected in the two versions of the phrase “they shall be as

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new,” or “they shall be new” in rabbinic literature³⁶

And since this preparation for new dimensions and levels of Torah is subjective, “each according to his measure,” therefore the custom of reciting Pirkei Avos is characterized as a custom that only some people follow, as a way of underscoring the subjective nature of the challenge of Torah study that follows Shavuos.³⁷

³⁶ See *Sifri* and *Rashi* on *Devarim* 6:6; *Rashi* on *Shemos* 19:1. *Devarim* 11:13 and other sources.

³⁷ Adapted from the talk of Shabbos *parshas Naso*, 5747, based exclusively on a listeners account.

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ESSAY SEVEN
PREPARATION FOR
THE FUTURE

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ESSAY SEVEN

PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

Begins in the month of Nissan

The season for reciting Pirkei Avos every Sabbath begins on the very first Shabbos following Passover in the (end of the) month of Nissan, the “month of **Redemption**”¹ One can find a connection between the recitation of Pirkei Avos and the future Redemption.

To be sure, the primary purpose of studying Pirkei Avos in the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot is to prepare for Mattan Torah—the Giving of the Torah.² However the means that we use involves refinement of one’s characteristics. The six chapters of Avos is said to correspond to the six primary charac-

¹ *Shemos Rabbah* 15:11.

² Introduction to *Medrash Shmuel* [See also preceding essays – Translator’s note.]

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teristics.³ Once they are refined we are ready to receive the Torah at Sinai.

However, simultaneous with our preparation for Mattan Torah by refining our souls' characteristics, we are also preparing for the future Redemption.

This premise is based on a discourse of the Rabbi *Dovber*, the *Mitteler Rebbe*⁴ who ex-

³ [See Essay Four for an explanation as to how the six chapters correspond to each of the six emotional traits of our souls. – Translator's note.]

⁴ [Rabbi *Dovber Schneuri*, son and successor of R. *Schneur Zalman* of *Liadi*, founder of the Chabad Lubavitch movement. The *Mitteler Rebbe* was a prolific author and was known for the way he took his fathers seminal thoughts (which were considered a major expansion of the thought system of his mentor, the *Maggid* of *Mezeritch* and his predecessor the Ba'al Shem Tov) and expanded them into an elaborate philosophical system. The title *Mitteler Rebbe* means "Middle Rabbi," a name given to him by the Chassidim of his successor, to differentiate him from his father, whom they called the *Alter Rebbe*—the Old Rabbi and from his successor, whom they called Rebbe. – Translator's note.]

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plains how the focus now—before the Redemption—is on refining one’s *midos*, one’s emotional characteristics. We do not have the capacity, however, to bring refinement to the intellectual traits as well, for that task is too formidable for our abilities in the present day and age, and will be left for the Messianic Age.⁵

Hence the refinement of our six emotional characteristics that occurs with our study of Pirkei Avos throughout the six Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot, which prepares us for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot can also serve to prepare us for the future Redemption.

To underscore the role of Pirkei Avos as a preparation for the future Redemption, the recitation of Pirkei Avos is prefaced with a Mishnah from Tractate Sanhedrin: “All of Israel has a share in the world-to-come.”⁶ This refers to the world following the Resurrection of the Dead, the ultimate level of perfection

⁵ S.v. *Al tatzar es Moav* (*Kehot* 5736) p. 6ff. Printed in *Ma’amarei Admor Ho’emtzai, Devarim*, volume p.

⁶ *Sanhedrin*, beginning of Chapter 11.

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within the Messianic Era. And it is through the study of Avos—and the concomitant refinement of our emotional traits—that actualizes the process that leads to the Resurrection of the Dead, the ultimate state of perfection.

This parallel between Avos as a preparation for the receiving of the Torah and a preparation for the ultimate Redemption is further exemplified by the very first Mishnah of Avos: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai.” Moses, the Midrash tells us was not only the “first redeemer” of Israel; Moses will also be the “final Redeemer.”⁷ This means that the power Moshiach will have to liberate the Jewish people and usher in the age of Redemption derives from the spirit of Moses within him.⁸

Hence the very first Mishnah alludes to the dual nature of Avos: preparation for receiving

⁷ *Shemos Rabbah* 2:4. *Zohar* I 253a, and other sources.

⁸ [It is not to be taken literally that Moses will physically be the *Moshiach*. See *Likkutei Sichos*, volume II p. 8ff – Translator’s note.]

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the Torah at Sinai and preparation for the future Redemption.

A third allusion to the relationship Avos has with the future Redemption can be found in the emphasis the author of Avos placed on the number three. Indeed, the very first Mishnah states: “they said **three** things.” The same is repeated in the next Mishnah that speaks of how “the world stands on **three** things.” The first chapter ends with “there are **three** things upon which the world endures.” And virtually all the other sayings in the first chapter (and to some extent in all the other chapters) are divided into three.⁹

This preoccupation with the number three relates to the theme of Redemption for the future Redemption is often referred to as the third Redemption and the time when the third *Bais Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) will be rebuilt.

In summation: There are three allusions to the theme of Redemption in Avos:

⁹ Even where it seems that there are more details in the Mishnah, they can still be divided generally into three categories as discussed on several occasions

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- (a) The introductory Mishnah “All of Israel has a share in the world to come,” speaks explicitly of the future age of Redemption.
- (b) The opening Mishnah that speaks of how “Moses received the Torah from Sinai,” alludes to Moshiach since Moses’ soul is “First and last redeemer,” i.e., the driving force for Moshiach and Redemption.
- (c) The prominence of the number three in Avos is an allusion to the third Redemption and *Bais Hamikdash*.

Since every detail of Torah is precise, we may conclude that each of the three references to the future Redemption in Avos contributes to a different aspect and dimension of the Redemption and our preparation for it.

Introducing the Liberating Powers in Three Places

The *Zohar* relates how Rabbi *Chiya* went to Rabbi *Shimon* to study the “portion of Passover.”¹⁰ The *Zohar* then describes what appears to be an incidental occurrence. Before he arrived at R. *Shimon*’s place he heard sev-

¹⁰ *Zohar* II 56b.

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eral men reciting the forty-eighth Psalm that begins with the dual expression “*Shir mizmor*,” both words that mean song. The *Zohar* then raises the question as to the significance of the two expressions for song. The *Zohar* answers it own question by saying that a double song is an “exalted one,” a song that is more sublime than other songs. The *Zohar* then cites two other examples of a double song: Psalm ninety-two: “*Mizmor shir l’yom haShabbos*-A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day;” and *Shir HaShirim asher liShlomo*-A Song of songs of Solomon.”

Even a cursory examination of this passage of *Zohar* will yield several questions that beg to be addressed:

First, what is the significance of a double song?

Second, why does the mere addition of a second expression of song so magnify its power?

Third, why does the *Zohar*, seemingly, “go off on a tangent” to discuss the double song that R. Chiya heard on the way to R. Shimon’s place to discuss the section concerning Passover? What connection is there between Passover and the double song idea?

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To resolve these difficulties we ought to preface the words of the Midrash¹¹ concerning double expressions in the Torah:

“Five letters were repeated, and they are all expressions of Redemption. [The letters] *chof-chof* [were used in the Torah] to facilitate Abraham’s exodus from *Ur Casdim*, as it says, ‘*Lech Lecha*, Go to you from your land....’¹² [The letters] *tzadi-tzadi* [are mentioned in the Torah], with it the Holy One Blessed is He is going to redeem Israel, in the future, at the end of the period of the fourth empire, as it says, ‘A man, *Tzemach* is his name, and in his place *yitzmach*-shall blossom.’¹³

The *Rebbe Maharash*¹⁴ explains the relationship between double letters and Redemption

¹¹ *Yalkut Shimoni*, beginning parshas Lech Lecha.

¹² *Bereishis* 12:1.

¹³ *Zecharya* 6:12.

¹⁴ [[The Rebbe *Maharash* (Acronym for *Moreinu Harav Shmuel*) was the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe and is referred to by the Rebbe as “*Lechatchilah Aribet*-Surmount the obstacle from the outset.” This unusual title was given to him because of his fondness for the expression: “The world

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by referring to another Midrashic comment that discovers the dual nature of the Sabbath: “All matters of the Sabbath are doubled, its *omer* [portion of Manna that descended before the Shabbos] is double, its song is double.”¹⁵ This double feature of Shabbos derives from the transcendent power of G-d that is referred to as *Sovev Kol Almin*, that which encompasses all the worlds, in contradistinction to the immanent force of G-d known as *Memalle kol Almin*, that which fills all the worlds.

In other words, the double expressions are not just intended to add emphasis to the word and theme that is repeated; it is actually indicative of a qualitatively higher and detached force. A “doubled expression” in the Torah represents unconventional powers that

says, when you cannot go under an obstacles you then attempt to surmount it, and I say that one must surmount it from the very outset.” In other words, the Rebbe *Maharash's* position in matters of holiness was to take an unconventional approach. This is consistent with the “double name” and Redemptive attitude that the Rebbe speaks of in the text. – Translator’s note.]

¹⁵ *Midrash Tehillim*, Psalm 92.

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go beyond that which is needed for the routine running of the world. Only when one must break out of the parameters and confining influences of life—i.e., Redemption—does G-d introduce this transcendent force, the force of Redemption.¹⁶

We can now understand why the *Zohar* refers to the three double songs in the context of an effort to expound on the topic of Passover, the Holiday of redemption. Redemption is not a one-dimensional process. It must permeate through the three levels of existence that are referred to in *Sefer Yetzirah* as *Olam Shanah* and *Nefesh*-World (Space), Year (time) and soul (energy).

In order for the process of Redemption to be complete it must permeate the very soul and energy of the Jew (*Nefesh*). A Jew must feel

¹⁶ [When Abraham had to take leave of his “land, birthplace and father’s house” he had to be given by G-d enhanced soul powers that would enable him to break away from all that defined him. This required a “double force,” one that is transcendent. Similarly, all the other double expressions that the Midrash cites are all representations of the unconventional forces of Redemption. – Translator’s note.]

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the liberating powers within himself; he must introduce the double-song power of transcendence into his personality.

But, liberation is not just a personal experience; it must also affect one environment—one's space (*Olam*)—by affecting and uplifting the things that one does to change the world. When one performs a Mitzvah they are making an indelible impression on the world, forever changing its composition. One must therefore instill the “double-song” liberating force into one's observance of the Mitzvos so that the liberating process extends to the world of space as well.

The liberating process, however, is not complete until it affects the third element of time as well, which serves as the intermediary between the more ephemeral aspect of *nefesh* and the more ethereal aspect of *olam*. This is accomplished by the study of Torah.¹⁷ For the

¹⁷ [The Rebbe does not explain in the text how time and Torah serve as an intermediary between space and soul. Perhaps, it is based on the notion that time is more elusive and abstract than space. Nevertheless it is not as spiritual as soul. Furthermore, in order for the spiritual dimension of the soul to engage the materialistic

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liberation dynamic to be complete, one must generate the double-song transcendent force into one's Torah study as well, so that the process of Redemption extends to all three components of existence.

These three “double songs” the *Zohar* refers to, thus, has a direct bearing on the “portion of Passover,” because Passover as the “Festival of our freedom” is the source of Redemption and in order that the redemptive process be complete it must be of a transcendent order (double song that alludes to *Sovev kol almin*)

nature of space, it must pass through the medium of time, which lives in both worlds simultaneously. Similarly, while Mitzvos deal with the most mundane aspects of existence—they involve physical objects and actions— and the soul is a purely spiritual entity, Torah, which combines the spiritual dimension (relative to Mitzvos, as it deals with spiritual concepts) with the human mind, possesses the dual quality of being spiritual and physical at the same time. It is therefore capable of serving as an intermediary between the physicality of space with the spirituality of soul. – Translator's note.]

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and must also permeate all three dimensions of existence.^{18 19}

¹⁸ My father in *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* [R. Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn] explains these three levels in Kabbalistic terminology. The two lower *sefiros* (Divine attributes and soul powers), *netzach* and *hod* are twin forces of *gevurah*. *Gevurah* must be tempered or sweetened. Thus the double song represents the way the two twin forces of *gevurah* are sweetened. The reference to three songs in the Zohar, is to indicate that there are three different levels of *gevurah* that must be tempered, for the attribute of *gevurah* is situated [and dominates] in the realm of *binah*, *gevurah* and *malchus*. Hence, the forty eighth Psalm, the Psalm recited on Monday: “A psalm and song for the sons of Korach” alludes to the attribute of *gevurah* which corresponds to the second day of the week; the ninety second Psalm, “A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day,” alludes to the attribute of *malchus*, the seventh attribute. The song of songs of Solomon, which refers to the G-d of peace is associated with *binah*. All three levels of *gevurah* as they are situated in *gevurah* itself, *malchus* and *binah* are thus sweetened by the double song.

¹⁹ The names cited in the Zohar, R. *Chiya* and R. *Shimon* are also connected to the Redemption.

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Loins Girded, Shoes on Feet and a Stick in Your Hand

We can find these three aspects of Redemption represented in the Torah's account of Passover (The "portion of Passover").

When the Jews were given the instructions by G-d as to the manner in which they were to leave Egypt, He told them to have: "their loins girded, their shoes on their feet and their sticks in their hands."²⁰

On the surface, these three instructions were merely external gestures intended to impress upon them the need for them to leave in haste. Upon deeper reflection, however, it is clear that these three instructions convey a more profound message.

The three instructions, to be girded, shoes on and stick in hand represent the three forego-

Chiya means life and it alludes to the ultimate manifestation of life that will follow the Resurrection of the dead, and R. *Shimon* is the author of and identified with the dissemination of the inner dimension of the Torah, the Torah of Moshiach.

²⁰ *Shemos* 12:11.

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ing areas of life into which one must instill the spirit of redemption.

Girding oneself refers to the way one must work on self-improvement. One's loins are the support for the entire body. One must see to it that one's entire structure is protected and fortified. This is liberation of self, i.e., *nefesh*.

The shoes are the support system for the feet with which one goes from one's own personal life to come in contact with others. The admonition for the Jews who are about to be liberated from bondage to have the shoes on their feet, thus, is a directive for them to instill the spirit of liberation into the outside world with which they come in contact. This is bringing liberation into *olam*.

However there are realms that are beyond our immediate reach. One must therefore find a stick, an instrument with which one can exercise control over things that are beyond our grasp. This corresponds to the way we must instill the forces of liberation into the elusive realm of time.²¹

²¹ [This theme the Rebbe alludes to in the *sicha* and refers us to his letter of that year (11th Nis-

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When one approaches the daunting task of affecting oneself, one's immediate environment and the entire cosmos, one can easily be stifled and intimidated. However, when one remembers the Talmudic dictum that "every person must say that the universe was created for me,"²² this enables the person to meet the challenge. The foregoing saying was not intended to let our heads swell or to exploit others, it is meant to teach us that all of the challenges that exist in the universe are in our hands to meet. When one rises to the occasion with a feeling of certitude, conviction and confidence, he brings a *geulah*, redemptive attitude to his task and will certainly succeed in his mission.

san, 5746), where he explains the three items in detail. The fact that the Rebbe compares the three steps of liberation within *Olam*, *Shanah* and *Nefesh* with the three items the Jews had to have when they departed from Egypt supports the way it is explained here in the text. – Translator's note.]

²² *Sanhedrin* 37a (See *Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin* Chapter 12:3) See Introduction of *Rambam* to his commentary on the *Mishnah* ad loc. s.v. *da*.

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The Three Redemptive Thrusts of Avos

We can now appreciate the reason that the role of Avos as a catalyst for Redemption is alluded to in three parts of Avos.

The prefatory Mishnah of “every Jew has a share in the world to come” is a reference to the personal dimension of the Redemption. Every soul will shine so brightly that life will be perfect in both the most literal sense as well as the figurative sense of the word. We will all achieve eternal life.

The opening Mishnah that speaks of Moses’ role in receiving the Torah at Sinai represents the role of Redemption as it pertains to the Torah. Moses as the first and final redeemer is the very personification of Torah, and this alludes to the role of Redemption in opening up new vistas and revealing the most sublime secrets of Torah, that were heretofore concealed and in need of liberation.

And the pattern of citing and focusing on three teachings in most of Avos, beginning with the opening Mishnah, is indicative of the role redemption has to play in our effort to change the world. It refers to specifically to the role of practical Mitzvos that are geared

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to affect the world²³. This is consistent with the nature of the directives in Avos that are about the way we behave in our interaction with the world around us.²⁴

²³ [One could also add, in light of the Rebbe's observation (*Biurim l'Pirkei Avos*, Chapter three, p. 135) that the number three alludes to one's interaction with the world. The number one refers to G-d in His mode of total exclusivity. The number two refers to the relationship we have with G-d. The number three is where we recognize that there is a world outside of us and that we must bring it into the equation. – Translator's note.]

²⁴ This is especially true if one follows the opinion of those who maintain that Avos is actually an introduction to the entire Talmud; "*Derech erez kodmah l'Torah*," Proper comportment precedes the Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3.) See *Meiri Avos*, ad loc. *Sichas Shemini* 5743. [In this light, Avos is considered to be the source of all that which Torah teaches us about how a Jew is to practice Judaism – Translator's note.].

ESSAY EIGHT

**TWO DIMENSIONS OF
AVOS AND TWO LEV-
ELS OF TORAH RE-
NEWAL**

INTRODUCTION TO PIRKEI AVOS

ESSAY EIGHT

TWO DIMENSIONS OF AVOS AND TWO LEVELS OF TORAH RE- NEWAL

Pre-Shavuot and Post-Shavuot

The universal custom is to recite Pirkei Avos in the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot, while in many communities—and this is also the Chabad custom—it is also recited on all the Sabbaths after Shavuot until Rosh Hashanah.²⁵

²⁵ [See Essay One and Six for a lengthy analysis of these two customs. In the preceding essay it was discussed how Pirkei Avos has a dual function. On the one hand, it serves as a preparation for Mattan Torah, and on the other hand it serves as a preparation for the future Redemp-

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There is a fundamental difference between the function of reciting/learning Pirkei Avos during these two periods: Whereas the recitation of Pirkei Avos between Passover and Shavuot is a **preparation** for Mattan Torah (the giving of the Torah), the recitation after Shavuot highlights the consequence of Mattan Torah. The opening Mishnah of Avos that documents the order of transmission of the Torah from Sinai through Moses, concludes with the directive, “And raise many students.” This refers to the effects of the giving of the Torah at Sinai that resonate and reverberate until the end of time.

The next Mishnah, as well as the end of the chapter, capture an even more dramatic aspect of the aftermath of Sinai. They speak of how the entire universe “stands” and “exists” because of three things (“Torah, *Avodah*-Service and *gemilus chassadim* - acts of

tion. However, more specifically, it may be suggested that the duality of Pirkei Avos can be said to correspond to the two periods in which Pirkei Avos is recited and studied. This essay seems to follow the latter approach of dividing the two functions of Avos into the two time periods Avos is recited – Translator’s note.]

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kindness,” in the first Mishnah, and “Justice, truth and peace” in the last Mishnah), which, in effect describes the impact the Torah has on the very state of the universe.

The fact that we read Pirkei Avos anew after Shavuot goes even further. It suggests that there must be a renewed acceptance of the Torah at this time.²⁶

This assertion, however, poses a problem. It is a well-known fact that one must approach the Torah as a completely new Torah every day. As Rashi interprets the words that were written as an introduction to the narrative about the giving of the Torah: “In the third month... on **this** day:”²⁷ “It should have stated ‘that day,’ why does it say ‘**this** day?’ [To teach us that] every day words of Torah shall be **new** to you as if they were **given today**.”²⁸

Rashi’s words are not hyperbole. The Torah of truth would not have demanded of us to view the Torah as something new if it were not true. Indeed, everyday G-d renews the

²⁶ [See Essay Six. – Translator’s note]

²⁷ *Shemos* 19:1.

²⁸ *Rashi* ad loc.

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giving of the Torah. This is evident in the text of the blessings on the Torah: “Who gives the Torah,” in the present tense.²⁹ Just as there must be a continuous process of creation that must be continuously renewed by its Creator,³⁰ so too, and even more so,³¹ the Torah which is the very source of creation,³² must be continuously renewed, which then allows for the renewal of creation.

This renewal of Torah occurs in a general way every Shavuot, on the anniversary of the giving of the Torah the very first time. This general renewal then generates a more particular renewal on a daily basis. Just as Rosh

²⁹ *Shaloh* 25a. *Likkutei Torah*, *Tazria* 23a. *Ma’amarei Admur Ha’emtza’i*, *Shemos*, volume 1, p. 175. See there for cross-references.

³⁰ As we say in the daily morning liturgy “Who renews every day constantly the act of creation.” See s.v. *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, 5749 (*Sefer HaMa’amarim Melukat*, volume 3, p. 175 and the references there.

³¹ See *Sefer HaMa’arim* 5705, p. 185 where this concept is discussed.

³² See *Zohar* I, 134a; II, 161b; III, 178a: He looked into the Torah and created the world.”

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Hashanah is the day that the entire creation is recreated and from Rosh Hashanah the power for creation on a daily basis ensues.

Where does one receive the ability to approach Torah on a daily basis with vitality and delight³³ as a totally new experience? It comes from the renewal of the giving of the Torah that occurs every Shavuot.

Renewal of Torah of a New Order

However, the fact that we begin reciting Pirkei Avos anew—Moses received the Torah at Sinai—on the Sabbath that follows Shavuot dictates that the renewal element of Torah in the first Shabbos after Shavuot is of an entirely different order than the renewal that occurs on a daily basis.³⁴

³³ “It should not be in your eyes as an old document...but rather as a new one, where everyone runs towards it.” See *Sifri* and *Rashi*, *Devarim*, 6:7. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Admur Hazaken*, *Orach Chaim*, end of sec. 1.

³⁴ This is also reflected in the opening words of the *parsha* that is read after Shavuot: “*Naso es rosh*—raise up the head,” implying that what occurs now is to take the Torah to a different level,

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We must try to comprehend what newer dimension of Torah can be introduced after Shavuot, above and beyond the general renewal of Shavuot and the more particular renewal every day?

To understand the nature of this renewal we must refer to the actual innovations that we find in Torah.³⁵ While it is axiomatic that all of the teachings of Torah were given at Sinai, even the novel interpretations that a worthy student of Torah might innovate,³⁶ this does not negate the **novelty** of the student's thought. At Sinai, those ideas were introduced to the world in a general format, in the underlying principles of Torah. It was the student's creative abilities that enabled him to extract the details from those general principles. The discovery of this detail is justifiably referred to as a *chidush*, a novel idea and it is duly credited to the one who made

raise it up, even in regard to the renewal that occurred at Mattan Torah.

³⁵ See *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 19, p. 252ff., see there for cross references.

³⁶ See *Megillah* 19b. *Yerushalmi, Peah*, Chapter 2:4. *Shemos Rabbah*, 47.

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the discovery,³⁷ to the extent that one ought to quote one's sources by name.³⁸

Moreover—and this is the most essential point—at Sinai G-d transmitted even those novel ideas that will only be revealed in the Messianic era; ideas that Moshiach will teach the nation.³⁹ These ideas are so utterly concealed from us, that when they will be revealed they will only be revealed by G-d personally: “A new Torah shall emerge from Me.”⁴⁰ The worthy student will be incapable of discovering the novel idea on his own. This implies that the Torah

³⁷ This is in addition to the fact that even without the chidush Torah is named after the person who studies it: It is called “his Torah,” and “it is named after him.” See *Kiddushin* 32b (and Rashi there). *Avodah Zarah* 19a.

³⁸ It is noteworthy that the statement “one who says something in the name of its author” is one of the methods to acquire the Torah (Avos Chapter 6:4).

³⁹ See *Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah*, end of Chapter 9 and other places. *Likkutei Torah*, tzav 17a. and in several other sources.

⁴⁰ See *Yeshayahu* 51:4

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that will be revealed in the future is infinitely higher than any teaching of Torah that can presently be revealed by the recipients of Torah. Our Sages put it succinctly: “The Torah that one learns in this world is vanity compared with the Torah of Moshiach.”⁴¹

When this new dimension of Torah will be revealed in the Messianic Age, it will also give the world a new face. Thus G-d declares through His prophet: “The new heavens and new earth that I make.”⁴²

This explains the difference between the general renewal of Torah on Shavuot along with the more specific renewal that occurs daily on the one hand, and the renewal of Torah in the Messianic Age on the other hand:

In the present day and age, all that is renewed on Shavuot and on a daily basis, is that which has already been revealed previously. The same idea that was already introduced the Shavuot before is reintroduced into this world and regenerated from its source (albeit in a higher and more exalted manner) once again. By contrast, the renewal of Torah

⁴¹ *Koheles Rabbah*, beginning.

⁴² *Ibid.* 66:22.

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that will come in the Messianic Age will involve dimensions of Torah that were never revealed before. These energies eluded detection by everyone and the world did not receive the energy from this hidden knowledge either.

Unqualified Liberation of Torah

To further clarify the difference between the two types of novelty with regard to Torah, the following quote from Avos is instructive: “Whoever says something in the name of its author, is as if he had brought redemption to the world.” The terms *golah* (exile) and *geulah* (redemption) can be applied to Torah just as it applies to the state of the world. When words and ideas of Torah have not been fully revealed they are in exile. When one exposes these ideas of Torah they bring redemption to the Torah, and ultimately it brings true liberation to the world as well.

In spite of the liberation engendered by discovering new insights of Torah, the liberation is incomplete. The general state of affairs is still defined as a *galus* state, because the liberation process is incomplete. There are still a plethora of Torah concepts that have yet to

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be revealed. This is analogous to the redemption of Purim,⁴³ which the Talmud characterizes as being incomplete since even after the miracle of Purim occurred, “we were still subjects of Achashveirosh.”⁴⁴ To be sure, this partial redemption can serve as a catalyst to effect the ultimate and complete Redemption.⁴⁵ However, since it is not a total and comprehensive redemption, the state we are in is still a *galus* one.

Only when all the hidden aspects of Torah will be revealed by G-d Himself, for it is the type of revealing process that only He is capable of, will the revelation of Torah be utterly complete. There will be no holds barred. Nothing will be left hidden, as it says, “And Your Master will not be covered, and your

⁴³ It is noteworthy that the very teaching of quoting sources as a way to bring redemption is based on the Purim narrative where Esther tells Achashveirosh about the plot to murder him in the name of Mordechai. (Esther 2:22).

⁴⁴ *Megillah* 14a.

⁴⁵ Especially since all matters of redemption are linked: “they share the nomenclature of *geulah*-Redemption” (Rashi on *Megillah*, 17b).

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eyes will behold your teacher;"⁴⁶ All will know Me."⁴⁷

And once the hidden precincts of Torah will be fully revealed, the Redemption of the world will also be complete.

The word for world in Hebrew is *olam*, which is cognate to the word *helem*, concealed.⁴⁸ It gets its name because its Divine life-force is in exile; it is not evident. Redemption for the world means that the Divine life-force will be fully revealed. This means that we will be able to realize the every essence of G-d who is responsible for creation. For only G-d's very essence has the power to create something out of absolute nothingness.⁴⁹ Once the world fully appreciates and internalizes within its own parameters the power of the Essence of G-d that is responsible for creation, the world then becomes a real "dwelling place" for G-d's very

⁴⁶ *Yeshayahu* 30:20.

⁴⁷ *Yirmiyahu* 31:33.

⁴⁸ *Likkutei Torah, Shelach* 37d, and in several other place.

⁴⁹ *Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh*, sec. 20.

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essence. A “sample” of this we already experienced at Sinai for a fleeting few moments, where G-d revealed His very essence. In the Messianic Age, this will be a permanent experience.

And just as the Torah is still in exile, because most of its hidden aspects have yet to be revealed, similarly, the world is in a state of exile until such time when all of G-d’s involvement will be fully manifested. Even after Sinai when the barriers between the spiritual and physical were removed,⁵⁰ the essence of G-d was and is still not evident within creation. As a result, even after the barrier was removed there is still a hierarchical system that accords greater importance to the higher spiritual realms and relegates the physical to a lower rung because there is a gap that separates the higher spiritual from the lower physical. For in our physical existence one does not readily see G-d’s presence even though we have the capacity to introduce G-dliness into the physical.

⁵⁰ *Tanchuma, vo’eira* 15. *Shemos Rabbah* 12:3 and other sources.

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When the complete unrestricted revelation of G-d's essence will occur within our physical world—that the physical world will feel how the essence of G-d is the essence of existence—there will be no higher and lower. As the prophet declares: “And the glory of G-d will be revealed and all flesh together shall see that the mouth of G-d has spoken.”⁵¹ It will be manifest for all that the existence of “all flesh” is the G-dly essence that creates it out of utter nothingness. Once this awareness permeates the physical world and it becomes a dwelling place for G-d's very essence, there will no longer be a separation between upper and lower—they will have become one.⁵²

Where do these revolutionary changes in the world begin? It all starts with the radical revelations of Torah that will accompany the Messianic Era. Once the most essential portion of Torah will be fully revealed, G-d's revelation to the world will likewise be unfettered. The entire world will be suffused with

⁵¹ *Yeshayahu* 40:5.

⁵² See *Mitteler Rebbe's Biurei HaZohar, Beshalach* 43c, and in several other places.

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the essence of G-d, and thus become a dwelling place for His very essence. And just as a person is completely uninhibited within his own home, so too G-d will be revealed without any covers and obstructions.

This is the meaning of the verse: “the new heavens and new earth that I make,” with the emphasis on the word I. It is I—the very essence of G-d that will be fully manifested in the time of Moshiach—that will render the world a totally new world.

Unlike the experience of Sinai which brought stability and tranquility to the world,⁵³ the

⁵³ As the Talmud applies the verse “the land feared and became tranquil” to the revelation at Sinai. Previously, the world was in a precarious state, since the creation and stability of the world depended on whether the Jewish people would accept the Torah. Once they did, the universe breathed a sigh of relief. Every Shavuot we experience a repeat of this sense of stability and tranquility that envelops the world. Once we experience a renewal of Torah, on the anniversary of Mattan Torah, the world also receives a sense of renewal. The general renewal of Torah on Shavuot enables the general renewal of the world on Rosh Hashanah, while the particular renewal of Torah that occurs on a daily basis is

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new revelation to accompany the future Redemption—when all levels of Torah will be fully revealed—will bring about a totally new world.⁵⁴

Ultimate Renewal in Pirkei Avos After Shavu-os

Now we can appreciate the status of Pirkei Avos after Shavuot. Just as Shavuot is the time when the Torah is received anew, but it is the same Torah that was revealed before, only on a higher plane, similarly, the recita-

what facilitates a daily renewal of existence on a daily basis.

⁵⁴ This premise—that at Sinai the world’s stability was incomplete because not all dimensions of Torah, the source of existence, were fully revealed—can shed light on the question raised by many of the great commentators, why in the first of the Ten Commandments it speaks of G-d as the liberator from Egypt and not as Creator of heaven and earth. (See *Sefer HaMa’amarim Melukat*, volume 3, p. 175 for the references). For even after Sinai, the power behind the creation from utter nothingness to something remained concealed.

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tion of Pirkei Avos—which serves as a preparation for the Torah—is not demonstrative of a completely new approach to Torah.

After Shavuot, however, the Mishnah's opening statement, "Moses received the Torah at Sinai," has to be read in the context of the dynamics of Mattan Torah that follows Shavuot. Now, the emphasis is on the word "received," alluding, first, to that which the worthy student is able to innovate and reveal. And it ultimately points to the even higher level of renewal, that which will be revealed by G-d Himself in the Messianic Age—the ultimate revelation of Torah.

This higher dimension of renewal is also alluded to in the words of the Mishnah of "All of Israel has a share in the world to come," that serves as a preface to the recitation of Avos. The phrase "world to come" refers to the world in the post-Resurrection era.⁵⁵ Hence that sets the tone for the emphasis on the renewed revelation of Torah of the future: "A new Torah shall come from Me."

One can find a further emphasis placed on the Torah of the future in the wording of the

⁵⁵ See commentaries on the Mishnah ad loc.

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Mishnah⁵⁶ that is recited upon completion of the recitation of the weekly chapter: “The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to make the people of Israel meritorious; therefore He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in abundant measure, as it is written: ‘G-d desired, for the sake of his [Israel’s] righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious.’”⁵⁷

The phrase “to make the Torah great and glorious” has been used by the Talmud to describe an approach to Torah study that has no other motive than Torah study itself. It is not even Torah study for the admirable purpose of knowing how to practice the Mitzvos by which to live our daily lives. This approach is evident when one studies the parts of Torah that have no practical application. When and where will this dimension of Torah find full expression and be fully pronounced? In the “new Torah” that will be revealed in the Messianic Era.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Makos* 23b, in the Mishnah.

⁵⁷ *Yeshayahu* 42:21.

⁵⁸ Despite the fact that even in the Days of Moshiach we will still have to know the things that we may and may not do, however, at that

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With this approach to Torah—that is inherent in the study of Pirkei Avos after Shavuos and alluded to specifically in the opening words of Moses received the Torah from Sinai—the “standing” and “endurance” of the world on Torah will assume a totally new meaning; it will be a “new heaven and new earth that I make.”

How Do We Reveal the New Dimension of Torah?

Having explained that the recitation of Pirkei Avos after Shavuos constitutes a qualitatively new level of learning because it represents and portends the “new revelations of Torah

point all the laws of the Torah “will be fully revealed and known to every Jewish person from the very outset without ever forgetting, and there will therefore be no need to be preoccupied with its study.” (*Iggeres Hakodesh*, end of se. 26). How much more so in the post-Resurrection era (“*Olam Haba*”) concerning which the Talmud (*Niddah* 61b; *Iggeres Hakodesh* loc cit.) declares: “Mitzvos cease in the future.” [In effect, in the future, it will be obvious that Torah study will be exclusively for its own sake – Translator’s note.]

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that comes from G-d," the practical question arises, how does one generate and instill this new dimension of Torah?

The answer is that just as Moshiach is the one to whom G-d will entrust this new revelation of Torah, which he will subsequently transmit to all of Israel, similarly, it is the spark of Moshiach⁵⁹

⁵⁹*Me'or Einayim*, end of *Parshas pinchas*. See *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 2, p. 599, 692 and other places. This concept is hinted to in the Jerusalem Talmud where in one place (*Ta'anis* 4:5) it applies the verse "a star shall emerge from Jacob (*Bamidbar* 24:17)" as a reference to Moshiach, whereas in another place (*Ma'aser Sheni* 5"6) it applies the word "star" in that verse to each and every Jew. The use of the word "*kochav*-star" in reference to Moshiach can be explained as follows: The word *kochav* is a composite of two numbers *chof-vov* (26) and *chof-beis* (22). Twenty six is the numerical value of G-d's essential name, known as Tetragrammaton, or the name *Havaye* that denotes the G-d of creation (*Zohar* III, 257b), and twenty-two are the number of letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the instruments through which G-d created the universe (See *Tanya, Sha'ar Hayichud vo'he'emunah*, Chapter 2.). This alludes to the notion that

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within us—referred to in Chassidic parlance as the *yechidah* of our soul—that must be revealed to hasten the process of Moshiach and the revelation of the new Torah and the new world.

And it is from this level of *yechidah*, the spark of Moshiach within our souls,⁶⁰ that the highest level of Jewish unity follows. The differences that exist between us and that which causes separation and discord derive from the layers of our personality that varies from one individual to the next. Only when the *yechidah*—the level of the soul that we all share equally—is fully revealed could there be genuine and enduring unity.

Moshiach will channel and reveal the level of *yechidah* **into** the world.

⁶⁰ The spark of Moshiach in each individual's soul is a spark of the general level of *yechidah*, the soul of Moshiach himself. See *Ramaz on Zohar* II, 40b; III, 260b.) When we reveal the *yechidah* of our souls, this then hastens the process and actually effects the revelation of Moshiach, who then reveals the *yechidah* of Torah, the innermost mysteries, the “new Torah.” See *On the Essence of Chassidus* for an extensive treatment of this subject.

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And since the Pirkei Avos that we study in the post-Shavuot period is expressive and a portent of the new dimension of Torah that will be revealed by Moshiach, this study also exemplifies the heightened measure of unity engendered by the revelation of *yechidah*.⁶¹

⁶¹ The concept of unity in relation to the Torah is clearly established in the Torah, where it is written that only after the Torah describes how the Jews encamped at Sinai—using the singular form to indicate their absolute unity—did G-d give the Torah. (*Shemos* 19:a-b and in *Rashi* and *Mechilta* ad loc. *Derech Eretz Zuta*, Chapter *Ha-shalom*). However, the most pronounced form of unity that one can achieve comes through the Torah of Moshiach that represents the unifying level of *yechidah*. And while this was given at Sinai, it will not be manifested to the world until the Messianic Age. The Shabbos after Shavuot, which, as stated, is a portent of the future level of Torah renewal, conveys more dramatically the message of unity. We allude to this higher form of unity each day when we recite—after having said the blessings of the Torah in which we stress that G-d is now giving us the Torah—“I hereby accept upon myself the Mitzvah of ‘Love your fellow as yourself.’” This is to prepare us for the future revelation of the “new Torah shall

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And this yechidah-unity is underscored in the prefatory Mishnah as well as in the concluding Mishnah. The introductory Mishnah reads:

“All of Israel have a share in the world to come, as it is written, ‘And your people are **all** righteous...’ This equality derives from the yechidah level of their souls.

And the concluding Mishnah states:

“To make the Torah great and glorious.” According to the Talmud, this phrase can be applied to the two extremes of Torah study levels. On the one hand, it refers to the person who is on the highest rung of Torah study, for the pure sake of Torah, as stated before. On the other hand, this phrase is used to justify competition among teachers of little children because competition will cause “to make the Torah great and glorious,” by expanding the number of students. Hence, the highest level and most elementary level of Torah study are joined together in this concluding verse, once again, pointing to that

come from Me,” since one must await and anticipate Moshiach’s coming each and every day.

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unifying element that brings all of us together.⁶²

⁶² Adapted from *Sefer Hasichos*, 5751, *Shabbos parshas Naso*, p. 583ff.

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ESSAY NINE
THE ALEPH, BEIS,
GIMMEL OF JUDAISM

ESSAY NINE

THE ALEPH, BEIS, GIMMEL OF JUDAISM

The Three-fold Nature of Existence

Pirkei Avos is punctuated with teachings that revolve around the number three. However, the three-fold nature of Avos is actually rooted in the very nature of Torah itself. The Talmud states: “Blessed is the Merciful one Who gave a three-fold Torah to a three-fold people, through a third [child] during the third day in the third month.”¹

We must understand what is the reason so much emphasis is placed on the number three in relation to Torah? And how does it relate specifically to Pirkei Avos?

¹ *Shabbos* 88a. See commentary of *Rav Nissan Gaon* where he adds several other aspects related to Torah that come in three.

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To comprehend the significance of the number three in relation to Torah we must first establish the premise that everything was designed by G-d to comprise three parts or stages:² Everything has a head, middle and end. The head not only comes first, but it also contains within it (the intent and objective of) the entire thing that it is the head of. Following the head comes the actual thing itself; the body, center and core through which the ultimate purpose—the third stage—is realized, as we say in our Friday night prayers: The end of action arose first in thought.”³

These three components as it relates to all of existence correspond to Torah, creation and Redemption.

The Torah is the foundation and genesis of everything. Our Sages thus refer to Torah⁴ as

² See talk of *Shabbos parshas Behar-Bechukosai*, 5750, sec. 4, for a more extensive treatment of the significance of the number three with respect to Torah. .

³ *Lecha Dodi* hymn

⁴ *Rashi and Ramban*, beginning of *Bereishis*. See *Tanchuma* ad loc.

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“the beginning of His way,”⁵ for it preceded the creation of the universe.⁶ And the very purpose of everything is the Torah. Thus, “*Bereishis*,” (which is usually translated as “in the beginning”) is interpreted to mean, “**because** of the Torah that is called *reishis*, the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth.”⁷

Then follows the actual creation of the world and the subsequent activities that the world must engage in, in order to live up to the purpose for which it was created (for the purpose of Torah).

When all of this is completed, when the world performs all of the functions that it was commissioned to do, we then arrive at the completion of the process with the onset of the genuine and complete Redemption, at which time “the very purpose of the creation of the world”⁸ will be fully realized.

⁵ *Mishlei* 8:22.

⁶ *Shabbos* 88b.

⁷ See n. 4.

⁸ *Tanya*, chapter 36.

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A Lesson in Hebrew Letters

One may suggest that these three levels inherent in creation are represented by the first three letters of the Hebrew Alphabet: *aleph*, *beis* and *gimmel*.

The *aleph* is the initial of the word *Anochi*-l, the very first letter of the first commandment. Generally speaking, it is understood that all of Torah is contained within the Ten Commandments.⁹ We also know that all of the Ten Commandments are included in the first word *Anochi*,¹⁰ which, in turn, is contained within and represented by the very

⁹ *Yerushalmi Shekalim* 6:1. *Rashi*, *Shemos* 24:12. *Tanya*, beginning chapter 53. See also *Torah Shleimah*, volume 16, supplement, sec. 1.

¹⁰ The word “*Anochi*” comprises all of the specifics of the entire statement *Anochi* [the first of the “Ten Comandments,” as is well known (See *Poras Yosef* (23d) in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*), and *Anochi* and *Lo yihey l'cha* encapsulate the entire Torah (*Tanya*, beginning chapter 20. See *Torah Sheleimah* *ibid*. See there for cross-references). Moreover, The statement of *Anochi* encapsulates the statement of *lo yihye l'cha* as well (See *Toras Menachem – Hadranim* on *Rambam* and *Shas*, end of p. 48ff.)

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first letter – the *aleph*.¹¹ Hence the *aleph* encapsulates the entire Torah, the source and head of everything else that exists.

Creation of the universe, as described in the Torah, begins with the letter *beis* of the word *Bereishis*: “In the beginning (*Bereishis*) G-d created heaven and earth.” Indeed, our Sages stress the fact that the Torah begins with the letter *beis* and not with *aleph*.¹²

And the Hebrew word used to denote the Redemption is *geulah*, beginning with the letter *gimmel*.¹³

¹¹ See *Panim Yafos* (by the author of *Hafla'ah*), *Shemos* 20:2.

¹² *Yerushalmi Chagigah* 2:2. *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:10. *Tanchuma* (Buber) *Shemos* 16 and other sources cited in *Torah Shleimah*, beginning of *Bereishis*.

¹³ Creation itself can also be divided into three stages: (a) The original thought to create; (b) the actual creation; (c) the completion and perfection of creation that will occur at the time of the Redemption through “our work and labor” that we have and continue to perform in the period of exile to introduce G-dliness to the world (*Tanya* chapter 37). In Kabbalistic terminology: (a) The Infinite light filled all of the space, before

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Three Stages of Torah

Since Torah is the very blueprint of creation¹⁴ one must be able to trace these three components of existence to the Torah itself.

The opening word of the Torah, *Bereishis*, as stated earlier, is interpreted to mean that the world was created for the sake of Torah. In other words, the first word of the Torah—that describes the beginning of creation—actually points towards that which **preceded** creation—the *aleph*.

the contraction (*tzimtzum*) is followed by, (b) the contraction of the light to allow for a vacuum, the purpose of which was for the ultimate revelation of the light within that vacuum; (c) the ultimate revelation where the infinite light that preceded the *tzimtzum* fills the vacuum, and the vacuum-world becomes a “dwelling place” (See *Tanchuma, Bechukosai* 3. *Naso* 16 and other sources. *Tanya*, beginning chapter 36) for His very essence (See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5765, volume 1, p.489 and references cited in *Sefer HaMaamarim-Melukat*, volume 2, p. 241, n. 32.).

¹⁴ See *Bereishis Rabbah*, beginning. *Zohar* II, 161a-b.

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From that point onward, the Torah—from Genesis through Deuteronomy—delineates the actual creation of the universe and the events that followed, as well as the instructions how to live within this universe in a way that will lead inexorably to the fulfillment of the purpose for which the world was created. That goal and its objective is, of course, the third stage of existence, the *geulah*.

Where is the *geulah* found at the end of the Torah?

Near the very end of the Torah G-d shows Moses all that will transpire “until the last day.” This is an allusion to the Age of Redemption. In the last two verses of the Torah, it heaps lavish praise on Moses and refers to, “all the signs and wonders... and awesome power that Moses performed before the eyes of all of Israel.” These signs and wonders and his awesome power also includes the final Redemption, for “Moses is the first redeemer and he is the final redeemer.”¹⁵ In that era of

¹⁵ See *Shemos Rabbah* 2:2; 2:6. *Zohar* I 253a. *Shaar Hapesukim*, *parshas Vayechi*. *Torah Or, Mishpatim* 75b.

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Redemption there will once again be great wonders that “all the eyes of Israel” will behold, as it is written, “as in the days that you left Egypt I shall show them wonders.”¹⁶ And the power of Moshiach to bring about the Redemption through these wonders is derived from Moses and the divine energy he possessed that reference is made at the very end of the Torah.

These three stages that are hinted in the Torah can also be found hinted in Pirkei Avos:¹⁷

The beginning of Pirkei Avos corresponds to the first stage, the genesis level that is the source of everything that follows: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai,” is a reference to the idea of Torah in its most general sense, wherein every teaching of Torah, “even

¹⁶ Micha 7:15.

¹⁷ [Finding a parallel hint in Pirkei Avos to the hint that is found in the Torah can be better understood in light of the approach to Avos that it is a general treatise and introduction to all the others. It follows from that premise that whatever paradigms can be found in the Torah, should also be found, explicitly or implicitly, in Avos. See next essay. – Translator’s note.]

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that which a worthy student shall innovate was included in that which Moses received at Sinai.¹⁸

The continuation of that statement—where the Mishnah details the way the Torah was transmitted to Joshua, and from him to subsequent generations until it was received by the Men of the Great assembly, who said, among others, “Raise many students”—corresponds to the second stage. This is the framework of worldly existence that provides for the mechanism for Torah to carry out its mission and realize the objective that was set forth at the very beginning. This second stage is where the goals that were originally latent are being fleshed out, and the worthy student is revealing those hidden teachings of Torah.

And all of this leads to the concluding quote at the very end of Pirkei Avos, “G-d will reign for ever and ever”¹⁹ This relates to the end of time, “in the future to come, when the entire

¹⁸ See *Megillah* 19b. *Yerushalmi Peah*, chapter 2:4. *Shemos Rabbah*, 47. References in *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 19,p. 252.

¹⁹ *Shemos* 15:18.

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Kingdom will be exclusively His,”²⁰ and the purpose for which the Torah was received, passed down and studied through the generations will come to fruition.

And this also explains why the Torah²¹ is connected to the number three. Since Torah is the means by which the drama of existence—which comprises three parts—unfolds from the original plan that preceded creation through its fulfillment and completion, the Torah is, therefore, also divided into three, *aleph beis* and *gimmel*.^{22 23}

²⁰ Rashi, ad loc. verse 17.

²¹ [And much of the teachings of Avos as well are divided into three segments – Translator’s note.]

²² See commentary of *Rav Nissim Gaon* ad loc.: “Torah, whose letters are in segments of three, *aleph, beis gimmel*.”

²³ Adapted from *Sefer HaSichos*, 5752, volume 2, p. 426.

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ESSAY TEN
WHOSE FATHERS?

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ESSAY TEN

WHOSE FATHERS?

The Significance of a Name

The name. Avos literally means fathers, which begs the question, why would the rabbis of the Talmud name this tractate that deals with ethics, “fathers?” Wouldn’t there be a more suitable name that more clearly describes the content of this book?

And names are indeed significant even if the great Sages themselves did not give them. For even when a name is given to something by Jewish custom it carries some weight, for “the custom of Israel is Torah.”¹ In this case, the name Avos was given to this tractate devoted to ethics by the rabbis of the Talmud: “One

¹ *Tosfos*, s.v. *Nifsal*, *Menachos* 20b. *Maharil*, cited by *Rama*, *Yoreh Deah* 376:4. *Minhagim Yeshanim mudra*, p. 153. See *Yerushalmu*, *Pesachim* 4:1. See also *Rashba*, *Torat Habayit*, cited by *Bais Yosef*, *Yoreh De’ah* sec. 39.

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who wishes to be a *chasid*, should observe... the words of Avos.”² We are compelled to conclude that the name is hardly arbitrary and that it is related to the subject matter of this tractate.

One can cite the Tractate *Berachos* (the study of which is mentioned in the foregoing passage of the Talmud as an alternative means of becoming a *chassid*) as a prime example. It is so named because the subject matter of that tractate is *Berachos*-blessings. Likewise Tractate *Peah* deals with *Peah* (the corner of the field one must leave for the poor). The Tractate that deals with the laws of the *Shabbos* is appropriately called *Shabbos* and the one that deals with Passover is called *Pesachim*-Passover.³

² *Bava Kamma* 30a.

³ The fact that *Pesachim* is in the plural and *Shabbos* is singular is easily understood. While there is only one Sabbath, there are two Passovers, the regular Passover, and *Pesach Sheni* that occurs a month later. And while *Likkutei Torah* (*Behar* 41a ff.) describes two levels of the Sabbath, in a legal context there is only one Sabbath, hence the singular use.

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It follows then that all names given to all the Tractates of the Talmud are related to the subject matter of that particular Tractate.⁴ What then is the relationship between the name Avos-fathers and the subject matter.

Tosfos Yom Tov explains that the name Avos was given to this tractate because “in truth, it is the Sages that are called fathers, analogous to Elisha’s calling to Elijah, ‘My father, my father.’⁵ Likewise the students are (Biblically) referred to as children⁶...”

This explanation, however, does not suffice, because the notion that the Sages are re-

⁴ [Obviously the Tractates of *Bava Kamma*, *Bava Metzia* and *Bava Basra* do not conform to this principle. However, those three were originally known as *Nezikin*-torts that describe what they are about. However, since that volume was too large, it was subsequently subdivided into Bavos-sections. See *Bava Kamma* 102a, *Avodah Zara* 7a and the Introduction to Rambam’s commentary on the Mishnah; Preface to commentary on *Seder Nizikin* of *Tosfos Yom Tov*. – Translator’s note.]

⁵ *Melachim* II, 2:12.

⁶ *Rashi*, *Devarim* 6:7.

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ferred to as fathers is true in every part of the Torah and in every tractate of the Talmud, not just Avos. And while it is understandable why the Written Torah could not be called Avos, since it (the Pentateuch) was revealed to us by only one person, Moses, and cannot therefore be called Avos, fathers, in the plural. However, every Talmudic Tractate has been transmitted to us by multiple Sages. Why wouldn't the name Avos have been appropriate for any of the other Tractates? Why single out this one—that deals with ethical issues—to be called Avos? ⁷

⁷ [See *Midrash Shmuel*, introduction, where he cites several explanations: a) It refers to the generations of teachers that are enumerated in the beginning of Avos as the links of tradition. The difficulty in this approach is that why should the name of an entire tractate be based on only the theme of the first Mishnah? b) When one guides someone to go in the right path it is as if he was his father. The difficulty here is the same that is mentioned in the text with regard to the analogous explanation of the *Tosfos Yom Tov* that a teacher of Torah is called a father. This is true of any teacher not just the teacher of ethics. c) All ethical teachings that can be found in any other work, either in Jewish sources or in non-Jewish

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Teachers and fathers

One could possibly explain this in light of the comment of R. *Ovadia miBartenuro* as to why the first Mishnah opens with the order of the transmission of the Torah from Moses through the generations:

“[B]ecause this Tractate is not intended as a commentary of any of the Torah’s commandments, as are all the other Tractates of the Mishnah, rather, it is devoted to the discussion of ethics and proper character traits, exclusively. Even secular scholars have written books, based on their own ideas, on the subjects of ethics and how to interact with one another. This author thus teaches us that the ethical and moral teachings of this trac-

sources, derive from Avos. The difficulty with this explanation is that it says more about other tractates than it says about Avos. Wouldn’t it have been more fitting to call this tractate by a name that expresses the content of the tractate itself? See n. 17 for an analysis of the Rebbe’s explanation and why it is the preferred one. – Translator’s note.]

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tate were not made up by the Sages of the Mishnah, but were also given at Sinai.”

We can now perhaps understand why the selection of the name Avos was confined to this Tractate that deals with ethics. To justify the name father for a teacher, the subject matter that he teaches must involve Torah knowledge. As our Sages comment: “Whoever teaches his friend’s sons **Torah**, the Torah regards it as if he had fathered that child.”⁸

Thus to underscore the Torah nature of this tractate in particular—that we might have otherwise thought represented the personal wisdom of the rabbis, and not part of the Oral Torah that descended from Sinai—there was a need to call it Avos. For only with regard to actual Torah knowledge can we justifiably call these teachers fathers.

Upon reflection, however, this answer is deficient for several reasons. First, logic dictates that the appellation of “father” can be applied to any teacher of any subject, so long as the subject has some real benefit and contributes to the development of the student. For after all, the reason why a teacher can be called

⁸ *Rashi, Bamidbar*

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father is because the teacher, as the father, is responsible for the making of the child. The father contributes the genetic material, while a teacher contributes the knowledge that enables the student to function and grow.⁹

Second, when one wishes to emphasize that this tractate was given by the A-mighty (contrary to the made-up wisdom of humans), the name should have been “Sinai” or something similar that reflects the essential point that these teachings come from Sinai, not Avos that is merely a tangential function of a Divine teaching. And, on the contrary, the name Avos-fathers focuses on the Sages themselves, rather than on the Divine source of their knowledge. We are at square one: Why then is this tractate known as Avos?

⁹ [While it is certainly true that the ultimate contribution that one could make to a student is to give him spiritual and G-dly knowledge and values, i.e., Torah, nevertheless, one cannot negate the usage of the term father for a teacher of some other useful area of knowledge. – Translator’s note.]

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The Gateway

The simple explanation is that Avos is indeed the foundation of and gateway to all of the other tractates of the Talmud. The “words of piety”¹⁰ that this tractate contains cultivate a keen awareness of G-d, which is a necessary prerequisite to the study of Torah. As our Sages, in Avos, put it: “Anyone whose fear of sin comes before his wisdom, his wisdom will endure.”¹¹ This is echoed by another saying of our Sages: “Anyone who has Torah, but is devoid of fear of heaven can be compared to a treasurer to whom the keys of the inner chamber were given, but not of the outer chamber. Which one will he enter?”¹²

Hence, this tractate is indeed the “father” that sustains and preserves the other teachings of the Torah.¹³

¹⁰ *Bava Kamma* op cit.

¹¹ Avos, Chapter 3:9.

¹² *Shabbos* 31a ff.

¹³ See *Tiferes Yisroel* ad loc. [This explanation obviously points to the special role of Avos see n 7 – Translator’s note.]

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Conceptual Basis of Entire Talmud

On a deeper level, one could explain the choice of the name Avos for this tractate based on the way the Talmud understands the meaning of the word Avos elsewhere.

When the Mishnah¹⁴ speaks of four Avos-fathers of damages, or “Forty minus one Avos-fathers of labor that are prohibited on the Sabbath,”¹⁵ the Talmud observes: “[If the word] Avos [is used] it implies that there are offspring.”¹⁶ And the Talmud there proceeds to enumerate the “offspring” forms of damage for which one is liable, and likewise the “offspring” form of forbidden labor on the Sabbath.

Here too, the fact that the tractate is called Avos-fathers implies that there are offspring. What are they?

One perspective concerning this matter is that when one looks at the various ethical teachings and “words of piety” enunciated by various Sages, one can see how the particular

¹⁴ *Bava Kamma* 2a..

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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character and approach of that author is reflected in his teaching. And conversely, by analyzing the saying of a particular Sage one can discern the unique approach to serving G-d of that Sage.

This is consistent with the way the Four Sons are introduced in the Haggadah: “The wise son, what does he say?” The original Hebrew word for “what does he” is *mahu*, which can also be rendered, “what he is.” Hence the Haggadah is revealing to us that a “wise son, (and analogously, the other sons as well) what he is, he says.” His own personality is expressed in his words.

This explanation can also be tied in with the explanation of the *Tosfos Yom Tov* cited earlier that the word Avos is an appellation for the Sages. However, now we can also understand why the Sages are referred to as Avos, specifically in this Tractate devoted to ethics, and not in any other part of the Talmud.

In light of the foregoing interpretation of Avos—that it suggests that the rabbis’ personalities and spiritual levels are reflected in their ethical teachings, this can obviously not be said about their other teachings that do

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not relate to spiritual and ethical matters.¹⁷ Therefore, other parts of the Talmud could not be called Avos.

One can take this point—that these rabbis’ personalities are the “fathers” of their sayings—a step further. Not only are their personality traits and levels of spiritual devotion reflected in their ethical teachings here, but moreover, these Sages’ attitudes highlighted in Avos are the fathers and sources of their opinions in all other portions of the Talmud.¹⁸

¹⁷ [The Rebbe’s explanation is that the spiritual personalities of these Sages are responsible for their sayings. This tells us something about Avos itself and of its authors, that the ideal ethical person is one whose sayings are consistent with who they are. See above n. 7. for the difficulties that exist in the other explanations. – Translator’s note.]

¹⁸ See *Tosfos Chadashim* (beginning of Avos) in the name of R. *Levi Yitzchak* of *Berditchev* for a similar explanation. It should be noted, however, that obviously, this explanation is limited to the Sages whose teachings are quoted in Avos. It does not include all of the Sages who preceded the Men of the Great Assembly, whose teachings are the first that are cited in Avos, nor does it

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This approach is reinforced when one considers the novel approach of the *Me'iri*,¹⁹ who asserts that Avos is indeed the first Tractate of the Talmud and its very introduction. *Me'iri's* opinion follows logically from the foregoing premise that the teachings of Avos serve as a conceptual basis for all their other teachings throughout the Talmud.

In a sense, Avos is a micro version of the Talmud, containing the conceptual basis for the teachings of these Sages scattered throughout Talmudic literature.

One can find an allusion to this parallel in the way the beginning and end of Avos mirrors the beginning and end of the Talmud. Commentators²⁰ have noted how the Talmud begins with the letter *mem* [of the word *Me'eimasai*] and concludes with the final let-

cite all the members of the Men of the Great Assembly themselves, not is it exhaustive in terms of even the later authorities, whose opinions are cited in other sections of the Talmud.

¹⁹ ?

²⁰ At the end of the Order of *Taharos*. See discourse of *Rebbe Maharash* (S.V. *Me'eimasai*, 5642).

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ter *mem* [of the word *Shalom*]. The same is true of Avos: It begins with the word *Moshe*, which begins with a *mem* and concludes with the word *olam*, which also ends with a final *mem*. This is certainly no coincidence, but it is a reflection of the way Avos represents the entire body of Talmudic literature, serving as it does as the “father” of all the other teachings.²¹

Fathers and First Fruit

The name Avos can also be said to allude to the exalted nature of the Jewish people, to which many of the teachings in Avos calls our attention.²² While our Sages assert that both Torah and Israel [the people] preceded and transcend the order of creation, the Midrash queries, “which of the two—Torah or

²¹ Adapted from the talk of Shabbos *parshas Shemini* and *Bamidbar* 5743, based exclusively on a listener’s account.

²² [See Rebbe’s Commentary on Avos Chapter 2:1. – Translator’s note.]

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Israel—came first?” The Midrash answers: “Israel came first!”²³

The *Zohar* speaks of the “three things that are knotted together, Israel, Torah and the Holy one Blessed is He. Israel is knotted with Torah and the Torah is knotted to G-d.”

The question is asked, why the *Zohar* speaks of three knots, when there are three entities, but only two knots—the knot between Israel and Torah and the second knot between Torah and the Holy One Blessed is He?

The answer given in Chassidus is that there is, in fact, a third knot, the knot between Israel and G-d, which is distinct from the link Israel has with G-d through the Torah. Indeed, this bond supercedes the other bond, because while the other one can be severed or strained as a result of one’s lack of bonding with Torah, the other knot can never be severed. And it is this bond that we depend on when we have transgressed; it is where we get our ability to do Teshuvah.

²³ See *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4. *Tanna dvei Eliyahu Rabbah*, Chapter 14. *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 34, p. 222.

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However, Chassidus explains, even the higher relationship we have with G-d that supercedes our relationship we have to Him through Torah, must be revealed through Torah. Torah is the source where this connection is revealed to us, and Torah is the scope that makes this transcendent relationship visible.

Likewise Avos—which contains teachings that go beyond the letter of the law—“matters of piety- which enables one to become a *chassid*, one who goes beyond the law”²⁴ is also a part of Torah. It is the Torah that reveals that which transcends the Torah and it is the Torah that enables us to reach the Divine that is even higher than the Torah.

One of the sources for the notion that Israel preceded Torah is the verse: “As the first ripening fig in its beginning, so did I view your **fathers.**”²⁵ This alludes to the tithe known as *Bikkurim* (first fruits)—to which Israel is likened—that is to be separated **before** the *Te-*

²⁴ See footnote n. 2.

²⁵ *Hoshea* 89:10.

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rumah,²⁶ also called “the beginning” and which alludes to Torah.²⁷ Thus, the name “fathers” hints²⁸ to the way G-d views the Jewish people, as His “First fruits” that even transcends the Torah.²⁹

²⁶ *Shemos* 22:28. Mishnah, *Terumot* 3:6.

²⁷ See *Or HaTorah*, beginning of *parshas Ki Savo*. See there for cross references.

²⁸ [One might add, perhaps, that the term Avos suggests that this tractate that expresses the transcendent nature of Israel is the father of all other parts of the Torah because it expresses the preeminent nature of Israel, even in relation to Torah. It is also noteworthy that the idea of Israel's preeminence *is hinted in the beginning of the Torah* (see *Sichos Kodesh* 5752. P. 248.), as well as at the end of the Torah (see *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 34 p. 222ff.). Likewise the beginning of the Talmud alludes to *Bikkurim* (See *Hadranim al Hashas*, Volume 2. P. 514). – Translator's note.]

²⁹ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Shemini* and *Bamidbar* 5743,