

Department of Teaching and General Studies

Ort Braude College

Name of course: **Ethics of the Fathers**

Course num: 81870

Course: 2 hrs. Per week, **Lecture**

Credit: 2

Primary Courses: non

Name of Lecturer: Dr.David Chaim Kalir

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Description of the Course

The student will attend classes.(At least 80%)

A final exam at the end of the Course- 75%

Participation and taking part in discussions- 25%

Purposes:

- Students will learn about the Oral Torah
- Students will become acquainted with Jewish thought

Internet :<http://moodle.braude.ac.il>

Abstract:

Ethics of the Fathers or in Hebrew: "Pirkei Avot", literally Chapters of Our Fathers, is a section of the Mishna, one of the most fundamental works of the Jewish Oral Law. The Mishna was authored in the third century C.E., and discusses laws and customs of virtually all areas of Judaism, ranging from holidays, dietary laws, Temple service, marriage and divorce, and civil law. It records opinions of scholars from approximately the five centuries preceding the Mishna's writing. Pirkei Avot is the only section, or tractate, of the Mishna which is devoted exclusively to the ethical and moral statements of the Sages. For this reason, it is usually referred to in English as Ethics of Our Fathers.

Structure

The course will be held by reading the sources and discussing them in depth. Sources will be given to the students in advance and we will study them. Some of the classes will be held in studying in pairs or small groups.

Lesson 1: Introduction

- ❖ Why is this tractate called "Avot" (2 explanations)?
- ❖ What was the purpose of bringing the chain of generations in the beginning of the tractate?
- ❖ The importance of this tractate.

The tractate consists of six chapters. It begins with an order of transmission of the Oral Tradition; Moses receives the Torah at Mount Sinai and then transmits it through various generations whence it finally arrives at the Great Assembly

It contains sayings attributed to sages from Simon the Just (200 BCE) to shortly after Judah haNasi (200 CE), redactor of the Mishnah. These aphorisms concern proper ethical and social conduct, as well as the importance of Torah study.

Lesson 2-3

The first two chapters proceed in a general chronological order, with the second focusing on the students of Yochanan Ben Zakkai. Chapters Three and Four are thematic and contain various attributed sayings in no explicit order. Chapter Five departs from the organization and content of the preceding four in that it consists mostly of anonymous sayings structured around numerical lists, several of which have no direct connection with ethics. The last four paragraphs of this chapter return to the format of moral aphorisms attributed to specific rabbis.

Well-known sayings- frequently-quoted rabbinic sayings

The tractate includes several of the most frequently-quoted rabbinic sayings, such as "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?" (Avot 1:14). It is written in simple and terse Hebrew and is attributed to the great sage Hillel, who was famous for succinct expression. Another famous saying: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it" (Avot 2:21) attributed to Rabbi Tarfon. Also attributed to Rabbi Tarfon: "The day is short, the labor vast, the toilers idle, the reward great, and the Master of the house is insistent." (Avot 2:20)

Lesson 4-5

From at least the time of Saadia Gaon (10th century), it has been customary to study one chapter a week on each Shabbat between Passover and Shavuot; today, the tractate is generally studied on each *Shabbat* of the summer, from Passover to Rosh Hashanah, the entire cycle repeating a few times with doubling of chapters at the end if there are not a perfect multiple of six weeks.^[4] The tractate is therefore included in many prayer books, following Shabbat afternoon prayers.

In the course of such study, it is common to preface each chapter with the Mishnaic saying, "All Israel has a share in the world to come" (Sanhedrin 10:1), and to conclude each chapter with the saying, "The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to bestow merit upon Israel; therefore he gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance" (Makkoth 3:16)

Lesson 6-7

Chapter 2 of the tractate. We will study the words of Judah the Prince.

Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] would say: Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for mankind.

Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the mitzvot. Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards, and the rewards of a transgression against its cost.

Contemplate three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression: Know what is above from you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book.

Lesson 8-9

We will study the words of Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi.

He would say: Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world, for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin.

Lesson 10-11

Rabban Yochanan the son of Zakkai had five disciples

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Hurkenus, Rabbi Joshua the son of Chananya, Rabbi Yossei the Kohen, Rabbi Shimon the son of Nethanel, and Rabbi Elazar the son of Arach. He would recount their praises: Rabbi Eliezer the son of Hurkenus is a cemented cistern that loses not a drop; Rabbi Joshua the son of Chananya---fortunate is she who gave birth to him; Rabbi Yossei the Kohen---a chassid (pious one); Rabbi Shimon the son of Nethanel fears sin;

Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is as an ever-increasing wellspring. We will study what each one of them taught and what was the virtue of every scholar.

Lesson 12-13

chapter 3 of the tractate

Akavia the son of Mahalalel would say: Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting. From where you came--from a putrid drop; where you are going--to a place of dust, maggots and worms; and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting--before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

We will study Rabbi Akiva's sayings: All is foreseen, and freedom of choice is granted. The world is judged with goodness, but in accordance with the amount of man's positive deeds.

Lesson 14: Summary and review

Bibliography

1. Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004),
2. "What are Ethics of the Fathers?", chabad.org
3. Wald, Shalom. "Meeting the Chinese Giant", *World Jewish Digest*, August 2008.
4. aharonhasini.tripod.com
5. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pirkei_avot.html
6. <http://www.ucija.org/Jamaica/Fathers.pdf>
7. http://www.mji.edu/templates/mji/article_cdo/aid/1066161/jewish/Ethics-of-the-Fathers.htm
8. <http://torah.org/series/pirkei-avos/>



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