



Pirkei Avot: A surprising pre-occupation with Divine Justice and Incentives

Reassurance of general reward

- 2:2 - I give you reward as if you had done everything
- 2:14 - Gd is credible to reward you
- 2:15 - Gd is pressing you to act, and there is great reward coming
- 2:16 - If you will achieve a lot, you will receive great reward, and Gd is credible to reward you
- 3:5 - If you will accept the yoke of torah, other yokes will be removed from you
- 3:15 - Your reward is based on your deeds
- 3:16 - The parable of Gd as proprietor of a business
- 4:9 - One who fulfills Torah from a position of poverty will fulfill it from a position of wealth
- 4:10 - Gd has a lot of reward to provide for you if you work hard at Torah
- 4:11 - Each mitzvah creates an agent who argues on our behalf
- 4:15 - Even if the righteous seem to suffer in this world, they will be rewarded
- 4:16 - Prepare in this world for the next
- 4:17 - A moment of satisfaction in the next world is worth more than all satisfaction in this world
- 5:1 - There is Divine reward for righteous people who build up this world
- 5:2 - Avraham received the reward which all preceding generations could have received
- 5:19 - The students of Avraham are rewarded in this world and the next
- 5:23 - One is rewarded according to the effort he puts into mitzvos

Reassurance of general punishment

- 4:9 - One who fails to observe Torah when wealthy will eventually fail to observe it when impoverished
- 4:11 - Each transgression creates an agent who argues against us
- 4:15 - Even if the wicked seem to thrive in this world, they will be punished
- 4:22 - There is no escape in the grave
- 5:1 - There is Divine punishment for wicked people who destroy this world
- 5:19 - The students of Bilam are punished in this world and the next

Statements that specific good deeds will be rewarded

- 2:7 - When you acquire Torah you acquire Olam HaBa
- 3:2 - Gd rewards even a person who sits and studies alone
- 3:13 - Tithes are a way to protect one's wealth
- 4:6 - One who honors Torah will be honored by others
- 5:14 - Reward for study, and for travelling to study
- 5:20 - One who is modest will earn Gan Eden

Statements that specific bad deeds will be punished

- 2:6 - You drowned others, and so you will be drowned
- 3:8 - One who willfully forgets his learning is liable for his life
- 3:11 - One who "reveals aspects of Torah" against halachah has no share in the next world
- 4:4 - Punishment for private chillul HaShem
- 5:8-9 - Specific punishments for specific sins
- 5:18 - There is no forgiveness for one who causes others to sin
- 5:20 - One who is brazen will end up in Gehennom

We should use reward as an incentive for Torah-observance

- 2:1 - Work on all mitzvot, because you don't know the reward of mitzvot
- 2:1 - Calculate the profit and loss for a mitzvah
- 2:4 - Nullify your will for Gd's, so that Gd will nullify His will for yours

We should use punishment-aversion as an incentive for Torah-observance

2:1 - Remember that Gd records your deeds, and then you won't sin

3:1 - You won't sin so long as you remember that you will have to give an accounting before Gd

Do not pursue reward for mitzvot

1:3 - Do not act like servants who serve on condition that they receive reward

1:13 - One who uses the crown for himself will pass on

2:12 - All of your deeds should be for the sake of heaven

4:5 - One who benefits from words of Torah removes his life from this world

### 3:1-26 Outline

3:1-4 Study Torah and observe mitzvot, and you will have a good life and the favour of Hashem and human

3:5-10 Don't stop relying on Hashem and honouring Hashem, and that will be good for you

3:11-12 Therefore, accept Hashem's mussar and pain that Hashem sends

3:13-18 Acquiring "chochmah" brings you wealth and life; it's better for you than commerce

3:19-20 Hashem formed the world with chochmah, binah and daat

3:21-26 When you acquire wisdom, you will not need to fear anything, and Hashem will protect you

3:6 <https://www.amazon.ca/All-My-Heart-Soul/dp/1880880016>

### Rashi Pursue Torah, not wealth; you will end up achieving both

#### 1. Rashi to Mishlei 3:5

בטח בד' - ופזר מעותיך לבקש לך רב ללמוד ממנו, ואל בינתך אל תשען:

"Trust in Gd" and scatter your money to seek for yourself a mentor from whom to learn, and do not rely on your own understanding.

#### 2. Rashi to Mishlei 3:14

כל חלופין שאדם מחליף בסחורה זה נוטל זה וזה נוטל זה, אבל האומר לחבירו "שנה לי פרקך ואני אשנה לך פרקי" נמצאו שניהם ביד כל אחד ואחד

Every commercial exchange one makes, this one takes this and that one takes that. But one who says to another, "Teach me your lesson and I will teach you my lesson," both lessons end up in the hands of each one.

#### 3. Rashi to Mishlei 3:16 (based on Shabbat 63a)

למיימינים בה ועוסקים בה לשמה אורך ימים וכ"ש עושר וכבוד, ולמשמאילים בה שעוסקי' בה שלא לשמה מ"מ עושר וכבוד יש:

For those who go to the right and in it and are involved altruistically, length of days and certainly wealth and honour. And for those who go the left in it and are involved in pursuit of benefit, there is still wealth and honour.

#### 4. Rashi to Mishlei 3:19

ד' בחכמה יסד ארץ - ע"פ התורה, והיא התורה והיא התבונה והוא הדעת. ואחר שכל העולם נברא בהם, לכך...

"Hashem founded the land with *Chochmah*" – Via Torah, and this is the Torah, this is the *Tevunah*, this is the *Daat*. And because the whole world was created with them, therefore...

#### 5. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 1:1, based on Mishlei 8:30 and 8:22

ד"א "אמון" אומן, התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אומנתו של הקב"ה. בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטיין, אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו, אלא דיפתראות ופינקסאות יש לו לדעת היאך הוא עושה חדרים, היאך הוא עושה פשפושין. כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה, ובורא את העולם, והתורה אמרה בראשית ברא אלקים, ואין ראשית אלא תורה, היאך מה דאת אמר (משלי ח) ד' קנני ראשית דרכו.

Alternatively, *Amon* = *Uman*. The Torah said, "I was the tool of Gd's craft." Normally, a flesh and blood king builds a palace not on his own, but via a craftsman. The craftsman does not build it on his own, but via plans which outline how to create the rooms and small entrances. So, too, Gd looked in the Torah and created the world. The Torah said, "In *reishit* Gd created", and *reishit* is Torah, as in, "Gd created me, *reishit* of His path."

6. Malbim to Mishlei 3:3

רוב דברי התורה נכללים בחסד ואמת, שהמצות ורובם באים על חסד שבין אדם לחברו, והאמונות והדעות נכללים במדת אמת, שיאמין באמתיות הנודעים ע"י התורה, וגם יש תורת אמת ותורת חסד, שהמצות והנהגות שיעשה מצד החיוב וכן העיונים הפשוטים המושגים לכל, נקרא בשם תורת אמת, והמעשים הנפלאים שיעשו החסידים ובני עליה מצד החסידות, וכן ההשגות הנפלאות שישגו בעלי רוח הקדש באלקות ובמעשה בראשית ומרכבה, נקרא בשם תורת חסד.

Most of Torah is included in *chesed* and *emet*, because most of the mitzvot are about *chesed* between one person and another, and beliefs and ideology are in *emet*, to believe in the truths known via Torah... There is also Torah of *emet* and Torah of *chesed*, for the mitzvot and behaviours one does out of obligation, and the simple analyses that are grasped by everyone, are called "Torah of *emet*," and the marvelous deeds performed by the pious and people of higher levels as piety, as well as the marvelous insights grasped by people with Divine inspiration in matters of Gd and the deeds of Creation and the Merkavah, are called "Torah of *chesed*".

7. Malbim to Mishlei 3:6

...שאתה תדע את ד' בכל דרכיך הכוללים כמו דרך הרחמים, דרך הנדיבות, דרך הענוה, תלך בו כפי ציוי ד' שהכל נסמך על מ"ש "והלכת בדרכיו" - מה הוא רחום וכו' - והוא ישר ארחותיך, שעל ידי סיוע אלקית יהיו גם ארחותיך הפרטים ישרים, כמו למשל בפרטי המעשים בדרך הנדיבות, לדעת כמה תתנדב, ולמי תתנדב, ומתי, ואיך, וכדומה.

... For you to know Gd in all of your broad ways, like mercy, generosity, and humility, going in that path according to Divine command, for all of that rests on "You shall walk in His ways' – Just as He is merciful, etc. (see Yerushalmi Peah 1:1)". And He will straighten your *orchot*, for via Divine aid your specific *orchot* will also be straight. For example, in specific actions in the manner of generosity, to know how much to give, to whom to give, when, how and the like.

8. Malbim to Mishlei 3:9

הוסיף שכן בכל ענייניך וגם באסיפת הקנינים, ראשיתם תתיחס לד' כי הוא הנותן הכל והכל מידו...  
It added that so it should be in all of your affairs and also in gathering assets, the first should be associated with Gd, for He gives all, and all is from His hand...

9. Malbim to Mishlei 3:14

ובארנו שהחכמה אמר שלא ימצא אותה ע"י בינתו ועיונו, רק מקבלה מד', ידמה אותה לחרוץ שימצאו אותו במעמקי ההרים דרך מציאה, וכן ימצאו החכמה דרך מציאה מאדון החכמה, כמ"ש "אשרי אדם מצא חכמה." והתבונה ימצאו אותה ע"י מסחר שמבין ומוציא דבר מדבר, כמ"ש "ואדם יפיק תבונה," ודומה כקנין הכסף שמוכרים וקונים בו דרך מסחר וחליפים... אלה הם קנינים אובדים ובלתי מתעצמי' בנפש והחכמה והתבונה המה קנינים קיימים נצחיים מתעצמים בנפש האדם:

We have explained that *Chochmah* said one cannot find it via one's understanding and analysis, only by receipt from Gd. He compares it to *charutz* which they find in the depths of mountains, as a find, so they shall find *chochmah* as a find from the Master of *chochmah*. As in "Fortunate is the one who finds *chochmah*." And *Tevunah* they shall find via commerce, understanding and producing something from something else, as it says, "And one who produces *tevunah*." It is like acquisition via money, which one sells and buys with, in commerce and exchanges... These are evanescent acquisitions, and they do not grow stronger in the spirit. *Chochmah* and *tevunah* are enduring acquisitions, which become stronger in the human spirit.

10. The metaphors of 3:16-18

3:16 Greater value is held on the right. In commerce, wealth is on the right. In Torah, wealth is the inferior benefit

3:17 The broad path is for the masses and is pleasant. The narrow path is for the elite, and it brings shalom

3:18 Torah is a tree of life for the struggler, and it's also good for the one who did not need to work as hard

11. Creating the world with wisdom Compare 3:19-20 and 24:3-4

12. Malbim's analysis of 3:19-20

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| • Building the foundation from nothing                    | Amassing chochmah |
| • Erecting the structure during the six days              | Producing tevunah |
| • Filling the house with good things after the first week | Daat              |

13. Malbim to Mishlei 3:23

אז תלווה אליך ההשגחה האלקית לשמרך מכל פגע

Then Divine supervision will accompany you, to guard you from all attack.

GRA 3:1-18 Pursue Torah, Mitzvot and Teshuvah 3:19-26 Chochmah and the Sefirot

14. The Vilna Gaon's sharp analysis includes:

- 3:1 "Do not forget" at all times, "Guard in your heart" for the right time
- 3:2 "Length of days" is long life, "Years of life" is to not perish early
- 3:3 *Chesed* is not a duty, *Emet* is a duty
- 3:4 *Chein* is a free benefit, *Sechel* is success in your efforts
- 3:6 *Derech* is a public path, *Orach* is a private path
- 3:8 Flesh is the 365 *gidin*/prohibitions, Bones are the 248 *eivarim*/commandments
- 3:10 *Asamecha* are stores of wealth, *Tirosh yekavecha* is your wine/produce
- 3:11 *Mussar* is suffering, *Tochachah* is speech
- 3:13 You find *Chochmah*, you produce *Tevunah*
- 3:14 *Sachar* is commerce, *Tevuah* is agriculture
- 3:15 *Peninim* are luxuries, *Chafatzim* are necessities
- 3:17 *Derachim* are broad paths, *Netivot* are small paths
- 3:18 *Machazikim* are those who fulfill Torah, *Tomchim* are those who support Torah

15. Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer (Vilna Gaon), Commentary to Mishlei 3:19-20

"ד' בחכמה יסד ארץ גו'" הם נגד ג' ראשונות, שהם חב"ד וכנגדן בעולם שמים וארץ וימים כמ"ש... (שמות כ:יא)... אמר כאן עשרה דרגין כי "שמים" כולל ג' רקיעים והן מעון ומכון וזבול, ו"תהומות" הוא רקיע ויילון שהן א', ו"שחקים" כולל שנים, ו"ערבות" הוא ג' ראשונות חב"ד..."