

Pirkei Avot 2:1

Translation:

Rabbi says: Which is the straight path that a person should choose for him/herself? Whichever is an honor to one who practices it and gets him/her honor from others. And be mindful of a light precept as of a weighty one, for you do not know the payment of the recompense for the precepts. And reckon the loss [incurred through the non-fulfillment] of a precept against its recompense, and the recompense [obtained through the non-commission] of a transgression against its loss. Reflect upon three things and you will not come into the power of transgression; know what is above you – a seeing eye, a hearing eye and all your deeds are recorded in a book.

Maimonides

It is clear that the straight path refers to the good acts, as we explained in the Fourth Chapter, and they are of the virtues that are midway. For through them a man will acquire a worthy disposition for his soul and his manner with people will be good. As it was said, . . . an honor to one who practices it and gets him honor from men. Subsequently, he said that it is necessary to be as heedful of the precept which one will reckon to be light, such as rejoicing on the festival or teaching the sacred language, as with the precept whose weightiness was made clear to you that it is great, such as circumcision, fringes, and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. He offered as reason for this, for you do not know the payment of the recompense for the precepts. The explanation of this subject is as I shall state, that is, the Torah in its entirety is comprised of positive precepts and negative precepts. Concerning the negative precepts, except for a few of them, Scripture made clear the punishment for each of them. For some it required Execution, for some Extirpation, or Death by An Act of Heaven, or Stripes. From the punishments for the negative precepts, we know, concerning all of them, which of them constitutes a major prohibition and which of them is beneath it. They are classified in eight degrees. The first degree, this being the severest among them, they are the matters which require Stoning. The degree beneath it, those that require Burning. The third, those that require Sword. The fourth, those that require Strangulation. The fifth, those that require Extirpation. The sixth, those that require Death by An Act of Heaven. The seventh, those that require Stripes. The eighth, negative precepts for which one does not receive Stripes. From these degrees we may know the weightiness of the iniquity or its lightness. Concerning the

positive Precepts, it was not made clear what the recompense is according to the Lord, may He be blessed, for any of them. All this [was intended] in order that we may not know which precept requires diligent observance and which precept is beneath it. However, it commanded one to practice this matter and that matter and did not make known which of the two bears the greater recompense according to the Lord, may He be blessed, therefore it is necessary to be heedful of all of them. As a consequence of this principle they said: One who is engaged in a precept is exempt from the [obligation to fulfill some other] precept; [this was taught in order that he proceed without comparing the precept he is engaged in with the other from which he was withheld. Therefore, they also said: We do not pass by the precepts; meaning to say, when the occasion for practicing a precept presents itself to you, do not pass it by and forsake it to practice some other precept. Subsequently, he said that although the measure of the dearness of one precept as against another precept was not made clear, they have an aspect through which they may be compared. That is, that every positive precept concerning which you will find that one who passes it by shall necessitate a severe punishment, know that in practicing it there is also a great recompense. The illustration of this-circumcision,

paschal offering, resting on the seventh day, and making a parapet, all these are positive precepts. However,

the requirement for one who performs work on the Sabbath is Stoning, whereas one who neglects circumcision, or a seasonal offering, requires Extirpation, while one who brings blood upon his house is guilty of transgressing a negative precept [which does not require the punishment of Stripes], as it was said, "that you bring not blood upon your house. . . ." From this you may know that the

recompense for resting on the Sabbath is greater than the recompense for circumcision, and the recompense for circumcision is greater according to the Lord, may He be blessed, than the recompense for making a parapet. This is the meaning of his statement, And reckon the loss incurred through the non-fulfillment of a precept against its recompense. With reference to reckoning . . . the recompense obtained through the non-commission of a transgression against its loss. He also said, the recompense [obtained] when you do not commit a transgression, this, too, was not made clear. However, you may deduce it[s recompense which is received for non-commission] from its punishment [which is necessitated by commission]. For the sin where the punishment for one who commits it is great, the recompense for his forsaking it is as that same measure in magnitude - as was made clear in Kiddushin, when they said: Whoever desists and does not commit a transgression is given a recompense as one who practices a precept - we have explained it there. [With reference to . . . and all your deeds are recorded in a book.] The language of the Torah [verifies that God is omniscient], since deeds are known before Him, may He be blessed, as Moses, our master, peace be upon him said: "... from Your book which you have written"

רַבִּי אֹמֵר, אִיזוּהִי דֶרֶךְ יִשְׁרָה שְׂיִבּוֹר לוֹ
הָאָדָם, כֹּל שֶׁהִיא תַפְאֲרַת לְעוֹשֶׂיהָ וְתַפְאֲרַת
לוֹ מִן הָאָדָם. וְהוּי זֶהִיר בְּמִצְוָה קִלְיָה
כְּבַחְמוּרָה, שְׂאִין אֶתָּה יוֹדֵעַ מִתּוֹן שְׂכָרוֹ שֶׁל
מִצְוֹת. וְהוּי מִחֻשָּׁב הַפְסֵד מִצְוָה כְּנֶגֶד
שְׂכָרָה, וְשִׁכָר עֲבָרָה כְּנֶגֶד הַפְסֵדָה. וְהִסְתַּכַּל
בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים וְאִי אֶתָּה בָּא לְיַדִּי עֲבָרָה,
דַּע מָה לְמַעַלָּה מִפֶּנֶךְ, עַיִן רוֹאָה וְאֵזֶן
שׁוֹמֵעַת, וְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ בְּסֵפֶר נִכְתָּבִין :