

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek V

Menachem Av 25, 5783 – August 12, 2023
Shnas Hakhel

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos
Chapter V

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פרק ה', משנה ב': עשרה דורות מאדם ועד נח. להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין ובאין, עד שהביא עליהם את מי המבול. עשרה דורות מנח ועד אברהם, להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין ובאין, עד שבא אברהם וקיבל שכר כולם.

Chapter 5, Mishnah 2: There were ten generations from Adam until Noach. This is to teach us the extent of G-d's tolerance; for all these generations angered Him until He brought upon them the waters of the Flood. There were ten generations from Noach to Avrohom. This is to teach us the extent of G-d's tolerance; for all these generations angered Him until Avrohom came and reaped the reward for them all.

The Simple Explanation

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura explains this Mishnah as follows. The Mishnah tells us of two groups, each spanning ten generations. First, it tells us of the ten generations beginning with Adam; these were the very first generations in history. The tenth generation was that of Noach. The reason for telling us of these generations is to demonstrate how great Hashem's patience is. Even though each of these generations angered G-d, He allowed ten such generations to pass until acting. It was only after many hundreds of years that Hashem brought upon them the waters of the flood¹.

This teaches us an important lesson. Throughout history, G-d has allowed many nations to thrive. This is so even though they mistreated His children, the Jews. From this Mishnah, we can understand that it is due to His great patience.

The second group was the ten generations spanned from Noach until Avrohom. Regarding those generations, we say that Avrohom reaped the reward for all of them. Avrohom single-handedly performed all the goodness and kindness demanded of the nine generations preceding him. Hence, he received all the reward to which they would have been entitled had they behaved following Hashem's wishes. This is in keeping with the teaching of the Talmud that² "each person

1. See Bereishis Chapter 5. In the early generations, people's lifespans were far longer than they are now. They also bore children at a far more advanced age than they do now. It is therefore obvious that their generations were longer than ours.

2. See Talmud Chagigah 15, b.

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is born with two portions; one in Gan Eden and the other in Gehinnom – Purgatory. If one merits, he receives his portion and that of his fellows in Gan Eden. Otherwise, he receives his portion and that of his friend's in Gehinnom."

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

The Mishnah tells us that "Avrohom came and received the reward of them all." The obvious question is, *what* reward? The Mishnah says that all the previous nine generations angered Him. The simple explanation which was cited above does not explain this fully. Avrohom did not receive *their* reward. He received his reward for all the Mitzvos and acts of goodness and kindness he performed.

This may be why the beginning of the Mishnah does not say that "Noach came and received the reward of them all." All those first nine generations (until Noach) angered Hashem; therefore, there was no reward for him to receive. Why was there a reward from the earlier nine generations waiting for Avrohom?

The Explanation

To understand this, we must first understand the difference between the sins of the generation of the flood³ and those of the era of the dispersal⁴.

The generation of the flood was primarily guilty of interpersonal sins. They sinned against each other; robbery and the like were too common. They would not get along with each other⁵. Contrast that to the generation of the dispersal. Their sins, for the most part, were directed against Hashem. The population "stretched out their hands against Hashem, to wage war against Him⁶."

This is the difference between the two groups listed in the Mishnah. Teshuvah, usually translated as repentance⁷, can atone for all sins. However, this only refers to sins between man and G-d. If one hurts or causes damage to his fellow, Teshuvah alone cannot atone until he makes restitution and his fellow forgives him. Even Yom Kippur cannot atone for interpersonal sins⁸. These were the sins of the ten generations from Adam until Noach. They had no atonement. Therefore, they also had no reward that Noach could reap.

The generations from Noach until Avrohom angered G-d. Nevertheless, they deserved a

3. The ten generations from Adam until Noach.

4. The ten generations from Noach until Avrohom. This was the time during which the population was dispersed throughout the world. See Bereishis 11:1-9.

5. See Talmud Sanhedrin 108, a. Also, see Rashi's comments to Bereishis 11:9.

6. See Talmud Sanhedrin 109, a. See also Rashi, *ibid*.

7. In fact, it means returning (to one's true self).

8. See Talmud Yoma 85, b. See also the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, Chapter 606, Paragraph 1.

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reward since they⁹ "behaved with love and friendship between themselves." However, because they rebelled against Hashem, they could not receive their reward. Their reward for extending kindness to each other was, so to speak, stuck. Due to their rebellion, it could not physically reach them ... "until Avrohom came and reaped the reward of all of them."

Avrohom was constantly working at reaching out to those around him. He was dedicated to drawing people close to the Shechinah – G-dly Presence. Due to his Divine service, he was able to rectify and refine the impurity of the nine generations which preceded him. He was therefore entitled to all of the reward hanging in abeyance for those generations. He was not merely entitled to their reward; it was natural for their reward to manifest itself in Avrohom because of his service.

A Practical Lesson

The Talmud teaches¹⁰ us that "even Jews who are sinners are filled with Mitzvos as a pomegranate is filled with seeds." Each of us is different and therefore focuses on a different type of Mitzvah¹¹. Some focus on Torah study. Others concentrate on Mitzvos, which are between man and Hashem. Yet others emphasize Mitzvos, which govern our relationship with each other. This Mishnah teaches us the special significance of such Mitzvos. May we learn from our forefather Avrohom to spread G-dliness to those with whom we come into contact by drawing them close to ourselves.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai, 5722)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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9. See Rashi's comments *ibid*.

10. See Talmud Chagigah 27, a.

11. Each of us is obligated to perform all Mitzvos. The only difference is which Mitzvos we emphasize.

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