

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Week of

Chapter V

22 Iyar, 5786 – May 9, 2026

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 3, Pages 753 - 757

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 the waters of the Flood upon them. 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 first generations in history. The tenth generation was that of Noach. The Torah tells us of these generations to demonstrate the greatness of Hashem's patience. Even though each of these generations angered G-d, He allowed ten such generations to pass before acting. It was only after many hundreds of years that Hashem brought the waters of the Flood upon them.

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 that 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 rewards to which they would have been entitled had they behaved according to Hashem's wishes. This is in keeping with the teaching of the Talmud that¹ "each person is born with two portions; one in Gan Eden and the other in Gehinnom – Purgatory. He receives his portion and that of his fellow in Gan Eden if he merits. Otherwise, he receives his portion and that of his friend's in Gehinnom."

1. See Talmud Chagigah 15, b.

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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 does not fully explain this. Avrohom did not receive *their* reward; he received *his* reward for all the Mitzvos and acts of goodness and kindness that 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 of 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

We must first answer a different question to understand this. What was the difference between the sins of the generation of the Flood² and those of the era of the dispersal³?

The generation that produced the Flood was primarily guilty of interpersonal sins. They sinned against each other; robbery and the like were all too familiar. They did not get along with each other⁴. Contrast that with 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 Him⁵."

This is the difference between the two groups listed in the Mishnah. Teshuvah, usually translated as repentance⁶, can atone for all sins. However, this refers only 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 sins⁷. These were the sins of the ten generations from Adam until Noach. They had no atonement. Therefore, they also had no reward which Noach could reap.

The generations from Noach until Avrohom angered G-d. Nevertheless, they deserved a reward since they⁸ "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, as it were, stuck. Due to their rebellion, it could not physically reach them ... "until Avrohom came and reaped the reward of all of them."

2. The ten generations from Adam until Noach.

3. 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.

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

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

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

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

8. See Rashi's comments *ibid*.

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Avrohom was constantly reaching out to those around him. He dedicated himself 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 that preceded him. Therefore, he was entitled to all of the reward that was hanging in abeyance for those generations. He was not merely entitled to their reward; it was natural for their reward to manifest in Avrohom because of his service.

A Practical Lesson

The Talmud teaches⁹ 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 Mitzvah¹⁰. Some focus on Torah study, while others concentrate on Mitzvos between man and Hashem. Yet others focus on Mitzvos, which govern our relationships with one another. 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 Talmud Chagigah 27, a.

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

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כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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לזכות
חיילי "צבאות השם"
חיים, עזן עודד, זכרי' מתן, ונת אריאל שיחיו
מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו

מאריס

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