



Likkutei Sichos

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Why Did He Receive Their Reward?

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1.

TWO SPANS OF TEN GENERATIONS

The *mishnah* says:¹

There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham to show how great is Hashem's forbearance. For all of those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Avraham came and received all their reward.

We need to clarify: Since these ten generations “repeatedly **angered Him**” as the *mishnah* says, what reward had they deserved that Avraham received in their stead?

Furthermore, earlier, the *mishnah* says:²

There were ten generations from Adam to Noach to show how great is Hashem's forbearance. For all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the Flood.

The *mishnah* **does not** say that Noach received the reward that was due to them. The simple explanation is that because they “repeatedly angered Him,” they did not deserve any reward.

In light of this, it is even more perplexing: Why, regarding the ten generations from Noach to Avraham, which also “repeatedly angered Him,” does the *mishnah* state that Avraham “received all their reward?”

Some commentators³ explain: Every person has a portion allotted to him in *Gan Eden*.⁴ If, however, a person is “guilty” {of sinning} (he then

¹ *Avos* 5:2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Rabbeinu Yonah*; *Bartenura*; and *Rashi* on *Avos* 5:2.

⁴ {Lit., “the Garden of Eden,” a place of reward where souls of the deserving transition to after a person's passing.} *Chagigah* 15a. {As explained in *Chagigah* 15a, each person, before he is born, is allotted a portion in *Gan Eden* to be given if he will be righteous, and also a portion in *Gehinnom*, if he is wicked. If someone is righteous during his lifetime, his allotted portion in *Gehinnom* is taken instead by a wicked person, and the righteous person receives (not only his own predetermined portion in *Gan Eden*, but also) the portion in *Gan Eden* that was originally set aside for the one who ended up being wicked.}

receives “his portion of *Gehenom*”⁵ and) another person who is “meritorious” “receives his own portion and the {allotted} portion of his fellow in *Gan Eden*.”⁶

According to this interpretation, however, the first clause of the *mishnah*, “There were ten generations from Adam to Noach...,” is difficult: Since they also “repeatedly angered Him,” while Noach was “a righteous man... in his generations,”⁷ Noach ought to have received “his own portion and the portion of his fellow (the ten generations) in *Gan Eden*!”

2.

WHO RECEIVED THEIR REWARD?

The commentators⁸ explain: Noach had not prayed on behalf of the people of his generation;⁹ nor had he devoted himself to drawing the people closer to Hashem and to inspiring them to behave appropriately. Consequently, he was not sufficiently “meritorious” to receive “all their reward.”

In contrast, Avraham had publicized the knowledge of Hashem throughout the entire world (“there he proclaimed there in the Name of Hashem, L-rd of the universe”);¹⁰ he had drawn people closer to Hashem, as our Sages¹¹ comment on the verse, “and the souls he made in *Charan*.”¹² Accordingly, he deserved to receive “all their reward.”

However, we must still clarify: Let’s assume that the ten generations from Adam to Noach also had an allotted reward prepared for them {should

⁵ {A place where a soul needing rectification goes after a person’s passing.}

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Bereishis* 6:9.

⁸ *Machzor Vitri; Likkutei Sichos*, vol3, pg. 756ff.

⁹ *Zohar* vol.1, 67b; 106a; 254b.

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 21:33.

¹¹ *Bereishis Rabbah* 39:14.

¹² *Bereishis* 12:5. {The “souls” here also refer metaphorically to the people who Avraham drew closer to Hashem during his stay in *Charan*.}

they had chosen to behave uprightly} (since every person has a {prepared} portion in *Gan Eden*, etc., as mentioned above). Noach, however, did not receive this reward because **he** did not possess sufficient merit. Who, then, *did* receive their allotted portion in *Gan Eden*?

We cannot say that nobody received it, since regarding *Gan Eden* the verse says,¹³ “Hashem placed him in *Gan Eden* to work it and to guard it.” After the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, *Gan Eden* became the place where reward is received by fulfilling the command “**to work it**” — the 248 positive commandments, and “to guard it” — the 365 negative commandments,¹⁴ in This World. *Gan Eden* is allocated to people for a specific objective and purpose. Therefore, there cannot be a space in *Gan Eden* which remains “void,” {and thus without purpose} especially a space consisting of the portions designated to all the people of ten generations — very **long** generations.¹⁵ Someone must have filled that space and fulfilled the purpose of {that portion of} *Gan Eden*.

We must therefore conclude: These ten generations from Adam to Noach never initially had any allotted portion of reward. As such, we must clarify how their **angering** of Hashem was different or worse than that of the second span of ten generations {from Noach to Avraham who did indeed have an allotted reward}.

3.

WHY "TEN GENERATIONS?"

We must further clarify: What is the novelty of the *mishnah's* statement, “how great is Hashem’s forbearance”? This is stated clearly in the verse, “Hashem (the L-rd) has great forbearance,”¹⁶ which (as Rashi comments)¹⁷ refers to Hashem’s forbearance for “righteous people and **wicked people!**”

¹³ *Bereishis* 2:15.

¹⁴ *Or Hatorah, Bereishis*, vol. 6, p. 2082; et al.

¹⁵ {The people in those generations enjoyed incredibly long lives.}

¹⁶ *Shemos* 34:6; *Bamidbar* 14:18.

¹⁷ *Bamidbar* 14:18.

Simply, the novelty of the *mishnah* is “**how** great is Hashem’s forbearance.” The verse does not mention the extent of Hashem’s “forbearance.” Therefore, the *mishnah* elaborates {telling us the extent} — “to make known **how** great” — that Hashem has “forbearance” for even up to “**ten** generations.”

Still, we must clarify: Why is Hashem patient up until “**ten** generations”? Additionally, what is the point of emphasizing “ten generations” specifically?

4.

TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

We will resolve all of the above through examining another concept: The order of *Mishnah* is precise,¹⁸ particularly within an individual chapter. Accordingly, clarification is needed: What is the connection between the *mishnah*, “There were ten generations from Adam to Noach,” to the previous *mishnah*, “With ten utterances the world was created”?¹⁹ If their only connection is the historical order, i.e., the ten generations began immediately after “the world was created,” then the *Tanna*²⁰ should have first taught the later *mishnah*,²¹ “Ten things were created on the eve of Shabbos at twilight,”²² which addresses the events transpiring at the conclusion of the world’s creation, which preceded the “ten generations” {which angered Hashem}.

The explanation: With its statement, “With ten utterances the world was created...,” the previous *mishnah* teaches us a double lesson: “In order to **punish** the wicked who **destroy** the world that was created with ten

¹⁸ *Tosfos, Bava Kama*, 102a s.v. ein.

¹⁹ *Avos* 5:1.

²⁰ {The traditional title of the Sages who taught and transmitted the *Mishnah*.}

²¹ {What is in fact} *mishnah* 6.

²² {“*Bein Hashmoshos*” in the original Hebrew. The time period between sundown and nightfall concerning which we are uncertain whether *halachically* it is considered day or night.}

utterances and to give a good **reward** to the righteous who **maintain** the world {that was created with ten utterances}.”

On the subject of these two teachings regarding these two kinds of people [a) in order to punish the wicked who destroy...; and b) to give good reward to the righteous who maintain...], the *mishnah* continues with two **parallel** teachings:

- a) “There were ten generations from Adam to Noach...” These ten generations consisted of wicked people who **destroyed** the world; therefore, Hashem punished them (“in order to punish...”) – “He brought upon them the waters of the Flood.”

- b) “There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham... until Avraham came and received all their {divinely allocated} reward.” Although these ten generations also “repeatedly angered Him,” nevertheless, Avraham **maintained** the world: He preserved the existence also of his ten generations.²³ Therefore, all the {allotted} reward {of the ten generations remained intact}, and “he received **all their** {potential} **reward.**”

5.

TWO KINDS OF EVIL

We must still clarify: What is the {core} difference between these two “ten generations” that allowed Avraham to bring about enduring “existence” for the second span (thereby affording him “all their reward”) {but was not possible for the first span}?

The explanation: In the physical battles that the Jewish people waged, some articles were consecrated while others were taken as spoils.

²³ See Rabbeinu Yona, ad loc: “He filled all their deficiencies.... {In other words, through his divine service Avraham was able to compensate for the wickedness of these ten generations, justifying their existence.}”

Similarly, the {spiritual} war against evil found within the world entails combat against two kinds of “evil”²⁴ (which accordingly necessitates two kinds of approaches):

- a) Some things are **wholly** evil, containing nothing positive at all. These things must be obliterated, along the lines of what the *mishnah* teaches {regarding earthenware vessels} “when broken, they become {ritually} pure.”²⁵

And explained in *Likkutei Torah* regarding the burning of the Red Heifer that the “red heifer” represents actions that are “truly, completely and inherently evil.” For this reason the “red heifer” is burned since there is “no recourse but to nullify and purge it from the world.” Only the ashes — representing the essential “power of desire” which is not “inherently evil” {since a person can desire positive things also} — remains.

- b) Other things, although not containing any apparent good, nevertheless, harbor a positive spark. Therefore, we do not have to destroy these things. Instead, we must work with them, “maintain” them, by **transforming** them from evil to good. [Affirming the potency of such a transformation, our Sages say,²⁶ “Those sheets that she had spread for him for a prohibited purpose, she now arranged for him for a permitted purpose.”]²⁷

This is the difference between the two spans of “ten generations:” The evil of the ten generations from Adam to Noach was total. It was an evil that **destroys** the world. Therefore, Hashem completely washed them away from the world, “He brought upon them the waters of the Flood.”

²⁴ See at length *Tanya*, ch. 6, et passim.

²⁵ *Keilim*, ch. 2, *mishnah* 1.

²⁶ *Menachos* 44a.

²⁷ {In other words, the looming illicit behavior of the two parties was not just prevented. Rather, the potential prohibited liaison underwent a fundamental metamorphosis. It was transformed into a permitted and sanctified relationship. In Chassidic parlance, such a radical reversal is called “*ishapchah*.” See *Tanya*, ch. 33. 36. — YED}

In contrast, although the ten generations from Noach to Avraham also “repeatedly angered Him,” their evil was such that it could be transformed into good. Therefore, Avraham, who through his *avodah* “maintained” the world, managed to repair and compensate for these ten generations, consequently — “he received all their reward.”²⁸

6.

TEN REPRESENTS "COMPLETION"

The reason why Hashem is forbearing {specifically} for **ten** generations:

We have spoken on many occasions²⁹ about the number “ten” being a “complete” number, symbolizing “perfection.”³⁰ Just as this is true regarding good, the same applies to evil: The complete and full extent of evil is expressed by the number “ten” — ten aspects of evil.³¹

Hashem has forbearance (awaiting for the repentance of transgressors) for up to ten generations — until the full extent of “repeatedly angered him” in all ten aspects (generations) of evil was reached.

7.

A PRACTICAL DIRECTIVE

Every person is considered to be a “small world.”³² Just as there were two periods of ten-generations in the macro-world, these two “periods” exist in the microcosm — in every individual’s divine service:

²⁸ {Since Avraham’s ten generations were not inherently good, they themselves did not earn the allotted reward. On the other hand, since they were not intrinsically evil, Avraham was able to “maintain” them, i.e., sublimate them through his divine service, thereby “receiving all their reward.” — YED}

²⁹ *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 13, pg. 282.

³⁰ *Ibn Ezra on Shemos 3:15; Pardes Rimonim, shaar 2.*

³¹ *Tanya*, beg. ch. 6.

³² *Tanchuma, parshas Pekudei, sec. 3.*

When a person is involved in undesirable matters for a period of an entire “ten days,” and nevertheless things are good for him, he may assume that things will continue to be good for him in the future, just as until now. As the verse says, “he may fancy himself immune, thinking, ‘I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart.’”³³ The *mishnah* tells such a person that the reason he has enjoyed the good life until now (despite his aberrant behavior) is because of Hashem’s “forbearance.” However, His patience will cease after a predetermined time.³⁴

Therefore, he must perform his *avodah* in a manner of “He brought upon them the waters of the Flood” — completely nullifying his negative aspects.

This *avodah* alone does not suffice. Since an entire “ten days” of undesirable matters have already passed, he lacks the good that could have been (and therefore should have been) accomplished during that time period. After all “days have been formed...”:³⁵ Every person has allotted a fixed number of days during which to serve Hashem {some of which he may have squandered or worse}.

Consequently, he must also engage in the second sort of *avodah* (represented by the second span of “ten generations”): He must “**maintain**” {i.e., rectify} those previous days — through the *avodah* of “*ishapcha chashocha linihorah*.”³⁶ Through this divine service, a person is able to repair and to compensate for what he has lost earlier, and do so in a manner that “he receives all their reward.”

– From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Re'eh*, 5735 (1975)

³³ *Devarim* 29:18.

³⁴ See at length *Kuntres Umaayon*, Discourse 11, ch. 2, *et passim*.

³⁵ *Tehillim* 139:16.

³⁶ {Lit. “transforming darkness into light”; see fn. 25.}