CHAPTER V

1 The world was created by ten utterances.
Since it could have been created by one utterance, what does this teach?
It teaches us that the punishment of the wicked,
who destroy a world created by ten utterances, is multiplied;
while the righteous, who preserve a world created by ten utterances,
are richly rewarded.

2 There were ten generations from Adam to Noah.
This demonstrates the extent of God's forbearance.
All these generations continually provoked God,
until God brought the flood waters upon them.

3 There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham.
This, too, demonstrates the extent of divine forbearance.
All these generations continually provoked God,
until our father Abraham appeared
and received the reward that they had lost.

4 Our father Abraham was tested with ten trials
and he withstood them all.
This demonstrates our father Abraham's great love for God.

5 Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in Egypt
and ten at the Sea.
The Holy Exalted One brought ten plagues
upon the Egyptians in Egypt and ten at the Sea.

6 Ten times our ancestors tested God's patience in the wilderness;
as it is written: "They have tested Me these ten times
and have not listened to My voice" (Numbers 14:12).

7 Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Temple:
No woman miscarried from the scent of the sacrificial meat;
the sacrificial meat never became putrid;
no fly was ever seen in the slaughter house;
the High Priest never became ritually impure on Yom Kippur;
the rains never extinguished the fire of the woodpile;
no wind dispersed the column of smoke;
no defect was found
in the Omer, the Two Loaves, or the Showbread.
The people stood pressed together, yet knelt in ease;
no scorpion or serpent ever injured anyone in Jerusalem;
no one complained: "It is too crowded for me
to lodge overnight in Jerusalem."
8 Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath (of Creation),
at twilight:
the mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well,
the speech of the ass, the rainbow, the manna, the rod,
the shamar, the writing instrument, the tablets.

Others add: the demons, the burial place of Moses,
the ram for our father Abraham.
Some add: tongs, which must be made with tongs.

9 There are seven characteristics that typify the clod
and seven the wise person:
The wise person does not speak
in the presence of one who is wiser;
does not interrupt a friend's words, does not reply in haste,
asks what is relevant, answers to the point;
replies to questions in orderly sequence,
when appropriate, concudes that, "I have not heard this," and acknowledges the truth.
The opposite of these typify the clod.

10 There are seven kinds of calamity visited upon the world
for seven classes of aveirot (sins):
A famine, brought on by drought,
comes when some tithe and others do not —
so that some go hungry while others have plenty.

A famine of tumult brought on by drought comes
when everyone resolves not to tithe;
a famine of extermination comes
when everyone resolves not to set aside the hallah dough.

Pestilence comes to the world when capital offenses
enumerated in the Torah are not adjudicated in court;
and also when the laws of the seventh year fruits are violated.

The sword descends upon the world when there is a delay of justice,
or a perversion of justice, and also when Torah
is not interpreted in accordance with the Halakah.

Wild beasts are set loose in the world when perjury is committed
and God's name thereby is profaned.

Homelessness is visited upon the peoples of the world
when there is idolatry, incest, bloodshed,
and violation of the laws of shemittah.

23 Korah and his followers were swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16).
24 The Israelites drank water from this well in the wilderness (Numbers 12:16).
25 Balan'ts's ass had the power of speech (Numbers 22).
26 After the Flood, Noah saw a rainbow as a sign of God's covenant (Genesis 9:13).
27 In Egypt, Moses used a rod to bring about certain signs (Exodus 4:17).
28 A legendary worm that could eat the hardest stone.
11 At four periods (during the seven-year cycle),
pestilence is on the increase: The fourth year, the seventh year,
the close of the seventh year, and annually
at the close of the Sukkot Festival.

In the fourth year, because of the poor-tithe due in the third year;
in the seventh year, because of the poor-tithe due in the sixth year;
at the close of the seventh year, because of the fruits of that year;
at the close of the Sukkot festival, annually,
because of robbing the poor of their gifts.34

12 There are four character traits among people. Some say:
"Mine is mine and yours is yours" — this is the average trait.
(However, some say this trait is characteristic of Sodom.)
"Mine is yours and yours is mine" — the trait of a peasant.
"Mine is yours and yours is yours" — the trait of the saintly;
"Yours is mine and mine is mine" — the trait of a scoundrel.

13 There are four kinds of temperaments:
Those who are easy to provoke and easy to appease —
their gain is canceled by their loss;
those who are difficult to provoke and difficult to appease —
their loss is canceled by their gain;
those who are difficult to provoke and easy to appease —
they are saintly;
those who are easy to provoke and difficult to appease —
they are scoundrels.

14 There are four types of students:
Those who are quick to understand but quick to forget —
their gain is canceled by their loss;
those who understand with difficulty but forget with difficulty —
their loss is canceled by their gain;
those who are quick to understand and forget with difficulty —
they are wise;
those who understand with difficulty and are quick to forget —
they have bad fortune.

15 There are four types among those who give tz'dakah:
Those who want to give but do not want others to give —
they begrudge their fellow human beings the mitzvah;
those who want others to give but refuse themselves to give —
they are miserly;
those who want to give and also want others to give —
they are saintly;
those who do not want others to give and themselves do not give —
they are scoundrels.

34 For laws of gifts to the poor, see Leviticus 25:9-11.
There are four types among those who attend the house of study:
Those who attend but do not practice mitzvot —
they receive a reward for their attendance;
those who practice mitzvot but do not attend regularly —
they receive a reward for their performance;
those who attend and practice mitzvot —
they are saintly;
those who neither attend nor practice mitzvot —
they are scoundrels.

There are four types among those who study with the sages:
The sponge, the funnel, the strainer, the sifter:
The sponge — absorbs everything.
The funnel — in one end and out the other.
The strainer — passes the wine, retains the dregs.
The sifter — removes the chaff, retains the grains.

When love depends on achieving a certain goal,
love vanishes when that goal is achieved;
but a love that is not dependent on any goal never vanishes.

What is an example of love which is conditional?
The love of Amnon for Tamar.36
What is an example of an unconditional love?
The love of David and Jonathan.37

A controversy for heaven's sake will have lasting value,
but a controversy not for heaven's sake will not endure.

What is an example of a controversy for heaven's sake?
The debates of Hillel and Shammai.38
What is an example of a controversy not for heaven's sake?
The rebellion of Korah and his associates.39

If one leads many people to a life of righteousness,
no transgression will follow,
but if one leads many people into a life of sin,
no amount of repentance can avail.

Moses was righteous and led his people to a life of righteousness;
therefore, the merit of the people is attributed to him;
as it is written: "He achieved the righteousness of Adoni
and God's ordinances with Israel" (Deuteronomy 33:21).

Jeroboam was a sinner and led his people into a life of sin;
since the sin of the people is attributed to him;
as it is written: "For the sins of Jeroboam,
which he committed and caused Israel to sin" (1 Kings 16:30).

35 See II Samuel 13:1ff.
37 See Ruth 1:3b.
38 See Numbers 16:1ff.
21 Whoever possesses these three qualities is numbered among the disciples of our father Abraham, and those who possess the three opposite qualities are found among the disciples of wicked Balaam:
A generous spirit, a humble soul, a modest appetite — such a one is a disciple of our father Abraham.
A grudging spirit, an arrogant soul, an insatiable appetite — such a one is a disciple of wicked Balaam.

What difference does it make if one is a disciple of our father Abraham or of the wicked Balaam?
The disciples of our father Abraham enjoy this world and inherit the world-to-come; as it is written:

“That I may give an inheritance of abundance to those who love Me and that I may fill their treasures” (Proverbs 8:21).

The disciples of the wicked Balaam inherit Gehinnom and descend into the pit of destruction; as it is written:

“You, O God, will bring them down into the pit of destruction; violent and deceitful, they shall not live out half their days, while I put my trust in You” (Psalm 55:24).

22 Yehudah ben Tama taught:
Be bold as the leopard, swift as the eagle, fleet as the deer, mighty as the lion, to perform the will of your Creator in heaven.

This was a favorite teaching of his:
The insolent are destined for Gehinnom; the shy, for heaven.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to rebuild Your city speedily, in our day.
May our portion be with those who study Your Torah.

23 This was another favorite teaching of his:
At the age of five — the study of Bible; at ten — the study of Mishnah;
at thirteen — responsibility for the mitzvot;
at fifteen — the study of Talmud; at eighteen — marriage;
at twenty — pursuit of a livelihood;
at thirty — the peak of one’s powers;
at forty — the age of understanding; at fifty — the age of counsel;
at sixty — old age; at seventy — the hoary head;
at eighty — the age of “strength”; at ninety — the bent back;
at one hundred — as one dead and out of this world.

24 Ben Bag-Bag taught:
Study it and review it — you will find everything in it.
Scrutinize it, grow old and gray in it, do not depart from it.
There is no better portion of life than this.

25 Ben Hay-Hay taught:
The reward is proportionate to the suffering.

At the end of each chapter of Pirkei Avot, the passage on page 280 is often read.
KINYN TORAH, OR THE BARAITA OF RABBI MEIR

1 Rabbi Meir taught:
Whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits many things; moreover, it was worth creating the world for their sake alone.
They are called: Beloved friends, lovers of God, lovers of humanity, a joy to God, a joy to humanity.
Torah clothes them with humility and reverence; it equips them to be righteous, saintly, upright, and faithful.
It keeps them far from sin and draws them near to virtue.
People benefit from their counsel and skill, their understanding and strength; as it is written: “Counsel and skill are Mine; I am understanding; strength is Mine” (Proverbs 8:14).
It endows them with sovereignty, with authority, with power of keen judgment.
The secrets of Torah are revealed to them; they become an effluent fountain, a never-failing stream; they become modest and patient, forgiving of insults; it magnifies and exalts them over all creations.

2 Rabbi Y’hosha ben Levi taught:
Every day a heavenly voice is heard from Mount Horeb proclaiming: “Woe to those creatures who have contempt for Torah.”
Whoever does not engage in the study of Torah is called detestable; as it is written: “Like a golden ring in the snout of a swine, is a beautiful woman lacking discretion” (Proverbs 11:22).
Furthermore, it is written: “And the tablets were the work of God, graven (herut) upon the tablets” (Exodus 32:16).
Do not read herut (graven) but rather herut (freedom), for no person is free but one who engages in the study of Torah.
Whoever engages in the study of Torah regularly is exalted; as it is written: “From Matanah (gift) to Nahaliel (inheritance of God) and from Nahaliel to Bamot (high places)” (Numbers 21:19).

3 One who learns from a colleague one chapter, or one halakah, or one verse, or one expression, or even one letter, is obliged to show respect.
This we learn from David, King of Israel, who learned but two things39 from Ahitofel, yet called him his master, his guide, his dear friend; as it is written: “But it is you, my equal, my guide, my dear friend” (Psalm 55:14). It follows, then, that if King David, who learned only two things from Ahitofel, called him his master,

39 The suggested emendation of הֵרוּעַ to הֵרֹעַ yields the more meaningful rendering, “who learned nothing from Ahitofel but only conversed with him…”
his guide, his dear friend — one who learns from a colleague one chapter, one halakha, one verse, one expression, or even one letter, surely is obliged to show respect.

Honor and Torah are synonymous; as it is written: “The wise shall inherit honor” (Proverbs 20:11).

Good and Torah are synonymous; as it is written: “I give you good doctrine, forsake not My Torah” (Proverbs 4:2).

4 This is the lifestyle for Torah students:
Eat a salty crust of bread, ration your drinking water, sleep on the ground, live a life of privation, exhaust yourself in Torah study. If you live in this manner, “You will be happy and all will go well with you” (Psalm 128:3).

“You will be happy” in this world;
“all will go well with you” in the world-to-come.

5 Do not seek high position; do not covet honor.
Let your deeds exceed your learning.
Let not your table be higher than theirs
and your crown greater than their crowns;
your Employer can be relied on to compensate you for your labors.

6 Torah is greater than priesthood and royalty.
Royalty is acquired through thirty virtues,
priesthood through twenty-four.
Torah, however, is acquired through forty-eight virtues:

By study; by attentiveness; by orderly speech;
by an understanding heart; by a perceptive heart; by awe;
by fear; by humility; by joy; by ministering to the sages;
by cleaving to colleagues; by probing discussion with pupils;
by calmness in study; by study of Scripture and Mishnah;
by a minimum of business; by a minimum of sleep;
by a minimum of small talk; by a minimum of worldly pleasure;
by a minimum of frivolity; by a minimum of worldly pursuits;
by patience; by a generous heart; by trust in the sages;
by acceptance of suffering;

knowing one’s place; contentment with one’s lot;
guarding one’s speech and taking no personal credit;
being beloved; loving God; loving all creatures;
loving charitable deeds; loving rectitude; loving reproof;
abounding honor and not boasting of one’s learning;
not delighting in giving rulings; sharing the burden with one’s fellows;
influencing them to virtue; setting them on the path of truth;
showing them the path of peace;

40 Some texts read כי ידע, referring to the give and take of colleagues.
41 Literally, “the Place,” a metaphor for God who is everywhere.
concentrating on one’s studies; asking and answering questions;
absorbing knowledge and contributing to it;
studying in order to teach; studying in order to perform mitzvot;
sharpening the wisdom of one’s teacher;
transmitting precisely what one has learned; quoting one’s source.

From this we learn that a person who cites the source
brings deliverance to the world; as it is written:
“And Esther spoke to the king, in the name of Mordecai” (Esther 2:22).

7 How great is Torah! To those who fulfill it, it provides life both
in this world and in the world-to-come; as it is written: “For they are life
to those who find them and health to all their flesh” (Proverbs 4:22),
and it is written: “It shall be health to your body and marrow to yourones” (Proverbs 3:8). And it is written: “It is a tree of life to those who
grasp it, and those who hold it fast are happy” (Proverbs 3:18). And it is
written: “For they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants
for your neck” (Proverbs 1:4). And it is written: “It will place a graceful
garland upon your head and bestow a glorious crown upon you”
(Proverbs 4:9). And it is written: “Long life in her right hand, in her left
are riches and honor” (Proverbs 3:16). And it is written: “For a long life,
years of life and peace will they bring you” (Proverbs 3:2).

8 Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai,
in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, taught:
Beauty, strength, riches, honor, wisdom, old age and the hoary head,
and children — all these are becoming to the righteous and becoming
to the world; as it is written: “The hoary head is a glorious crown,
achieved by a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31). And it is written: “The
glory of the young is their strength, the beauty of the old, the hoary
head” (Proverbs 20:29). And it is written: “The crown of the wise is
their riches” (Proverbs 14:24). And it is written: “Children’s children are
the crown of the old, parents are the glory of their children” (Proverbs
17:6). And it is written: “The moon will be ashamed and the sun
abashed, for Adonai Ty’va-at will reign in Zion and Jerusalem; God’s
glory shall stand revealed before the elders.” (Isaiah 24:23).
Rabbi Shimon ben Menashe, taught:
These seven virtues that the sages ascribed to the righteous
were all present in Rabbi and in his sons.42

9 Rabbi Yose ben Kisma related:
Once I was traveling on a journey. A certain man met me
and extended greetings. I greeted him in return. He inquired: “From
where do you come?” I replied: “I come from a great city of scholars
and sages.” He said: “Rabbi, if it would please you to live with us in
our community, I would give you thousands of gold dinarim, as well
as the most precious stones and pearls in the world.” I replied:
“Though you give me all the silver, gold, precious stones, and pearls
in the world, I would not live anywhere except in a community
where there is Torah.”

42 The reference to Rabbi Yochai Ha-Nasi and his illustrious descendants.
Moreover, neither silver, gold, precious stones, nor pearls will accompany a person in death, only Torah and good deeds; as it is written: “When you walk it will lead you” — in this world; “when you lie down it will watch over you” — in the grave; “when you awake it will talk with you” — in the world-to-come. Thus is it written in the Book of Psalms by David, King of Israel: “The teaching you have proclaimed means more to me than a fortune in gold and silver” (Psalm 119:72). And it is written: “Mine is the silver, Mine the gold, says Adonai Te’va’o” (Haggai 2:8).

10 The Holy Exalted One acquired five possessions in the world. These are: Torah, heaven and earth, Abraham, the people Israel, and the Holy Temple.

How do we know this about Torah? It is written: “Adonai possessed me as the first of His works, the beginning of His Creation in the days of old” (Proverbs 8:22).

How do we know this about heaven and earth? It is written: “Thus said Adonai: The heaven is My throne and the earth My footstool. What kind of House would you build for Me, what kind of place for My dwelling? (Isaiah 66:1). And it is written: “How manifold are Your works, Adonai! In wisdom have You made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Psalms 104:24).

How do we know this about Abraham? It is written: “He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abraham of God most high, possessor of heaven and earth’” (Genesis 14:19).

How do we know this about the people Israel? It is written: “Till Your people pass over, Adonai, till this people You have acquired, pass over” (Exodus 15:14). It is further written: “As for the holy ones on earth, they are the noble ones, all My delight is in them” (Psalms 102:19).

How do we know this about the Holy Temple? It is written: “The place of Your abode, which You, Adonai, have made; the Sanctuary, Adonai, which Your hands have established” (Exodus 15:17). It is further written: “God brought them to His holy region, to the mountain which His right hand had acquired” (Psalms 78:54).

11 Everything that the Holy Exalted One created in the world, was created solely for God’s glory; as it is written: “Everything that is called by My name, I created it, I formed it, I made it, for My glory” (Isaiah 43:7). It is further written: “Adonai shall reign for ever and ever” (Exodus 15:19).

This passage is often read after each chapter of Pirkei Avot.

MASEKHT MISHNAH

Rabbi Hananya ben Akashiyah taught: The Holy Exalted One desired to benefit the people Israel; therefore, God gave them the Torah with an abundance of mitzvot; as it is written: “Adonai was pleased, for His righteousness’ sake, to make the Torah great and glorious” (Isaiah 62:21).

This passage is often read after each chapter of Pirkei Avot.