

# The Dee

## Pirkei Avot Project

אַנְטִיגוֹנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֶל תְּהִיוּ כְעֹבְדִים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, אֲלֵא הוּוּ כְעֹבְדִים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, וְיֵהי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם:

Antigonus a man of Socho received [the oral tradition] from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: do not be like servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve the master without the expectation of receiving a reward, and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.

Antigonus of Socho, is surprisingly mentioned with a Greek name. He was a *talmid* (student) of Shimon HaTzadik, and his talmidim were the first *zug* (pair of scholars, serving as president and Head of Beit Din). Antigonus is responsible for passing the Torah of the Great Assembly to a new generation of scholars. Given his unique position, why does Mishna use his Greek name as opposed to his Hebrew name?

To answer this question, we must understand the sequence in Pirkei Avot. The Perek begins by outlining the transmission of the Oral Torah from Moshe, the "man of G-d" (Psalms 90), to Yehoshua and in turn to the elders, prophets and Men of the Great Assembly. Bnei Yisrael's spiritual level decreased in every subsequent generation as demonstrated by the gradual fading of prophecy and open miracles.

Shimon HaTzadik, last surviving member of the Great Assembly, greets Alexander the Great as he conquers Judaea (Yoma 69a). He successfully convinces Alexander to sustain Jewish life in Judaea. Following Alexander's death, the Greeks forcefully impose Hellenism on Bnei Yisrael. This represents the nation hitting a rock-bottom in spirituality, having steadily degenerated since the times of Moshe.

The Greek name Antigonus highlights the extent of Hellenistic influence in 'the period of darkness' (Bereshit Raba 1:1). G-d's presence is concealed, and Jews who bravely continued observing Torah were persecuted. Yossi Ben Yoezer, Antigonus' *talmid* (mentioned in the next Mishna), is brutally crucified by the Greeks.

In this tragic era of darkness, the eternal transmission of Torah came with no apparent reward, yet Antigonus still pursued Torah. The word reward in Hebrew is *peras*, which can also mean a slice or a portion. By following the Torah on condition of receiving reward, we can only achieve a small portion of God's gift to His people. However, as Antigonus states at the end of the Mishna, the ultimate reward is "the fear of heaven". Sefer HaTanya explains that there are two types of fear; the 'earthly fear' of consequences and the 'heavenly fear' of the potential missed opportunity in fulfilling one's purpose. The heavenly fear of God "is our treasure" (Isaiah 33:6).

### Discussion Points:

In what ways is our world similar to the Hellenised world of Antigonus?

What does the 'fear of Heaven' mean to me?

How can I be conscious to serve Hashem (and those around me) without seeking rewards in return?

Idea by Rav Ebrahimoff, teacher of Maia and Rina

### לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה

מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

היום שלושים יום שהם ערבעה שבועות ושני ימים לעומר

