

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Mazel-Tov to one of my closest friends (who prefers to avoid publicity) on his Double Chai Hebrew birthday this Shabbat, 6 Mar Heshvan.

God created a world for humans out of a world that consisted of darkness with waters covering the world, where God's spirit acted like a wind over the waters (1:1). Humans could not exist in such a world. God decided, out of love, to create a world for humans and make space for them. God requested that humans walk with Him, make room in our lives for Him, and obey one simple rule (not to eat from one single tree in the garden). Adam and Chava disobeyed this rule and had to leave God's special place (Gan Eden). Further generations displayed greater and greater evil. God cursed the land. Because the land was evil, God decided to destroy the land that He had created for humans and start again. God reversed the steps of creation so waters covered the earth again. God then recreated the world the same way that he had originally created it.

When the world was ready, God told Noach to take his family, spread out, and populate the land. Instead of obeying, the people congregated, first in the mountainous region around the Ararat Mountains, and then in the valley of Shinar (9:1 ff.). Rather than using God's gifts (stones) to build homes, the people invented bricks and made them as hard as rocks. Their message was that they preferred to make their own items rather than accept God's gifts. They also decided to build a tower to glorify their name, rather than seeking a relationship with God.

Humans focused on sins were unable or uninterested in developing a relationship with God. A relationship with all humans was not an option for God, so His plan B was to focus on a relationship with selected individuals. The world needed an exemplary role model (Avram). God's hope was that a few special individuals could influence others to work toward a relationship with God, improve the world (tikkun olam), and teach others kindness toward fellow humans (especially those less fortunate than they are). These principles recur throughout the Torah and Navi.

Avram's father, Terach, started obeying God's desires by leaving Mesopotamia and going southwest toward Canaan. Avram continued that journey, and he devoted his life to correcting the errors (sins) of the generation of Shinar. Avram sought out new areas to populate the land, spoke out in God's name, and intervened whenever possible to show kindness to others (chesed). When we first meet Avram, he is 75 years old. The Midrash fills in many details of Avram's early life – details that Rabbi Yitz Etshalom shows have connections to statements in the Torah (see Devar Torah on Avraham's early life, attached to the E-mail version).

The themes that emerge in the first two thousand years, from creation to Avram's adulthood, reappear throughout the Torah. God continues to demonstrate His love to humans who seek a relationship with Him. As humans continue to fail to meet God's desires, He lowers His standards – permitting humans to eat animals (but not their blood), finding ways to forgive sins, and offering ways to recreate the closeness that humans originally had with God in Gan Eden. Examples of God's love for His people come out over and over in the Torah, and God's focus on chesed as a guiding principle for humans extends beyond the Torah to all segments of Jewish history.

The Midrash contains a story in which Noach asks God why He had to destroy the world and so much life. God responds that Noach should have prayed for the people during the 120 years in which he was building his tevah and telling people of the coming destruction. If Noach had prayed for the people, God would not have needed to bring the flood that destroyed so many of them. (This Midrash implicitly compares Noach to Avraham's reaction when God told him about the coming destruction of Sodom and Amorah.) Noach was a Tzadek in his generation, but he lacked Avraham's chesed (and insight). Without this chesed, Noach did not merit to be one of our Patriarchs.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, spent a huge percentage of his Devrei Torah on aspects of chesed. In those days, I did not know enough to realize that chesed is perhaps the number one theme in the Torah. This conclusion is implicit in Rabbi Hillel's famous summary of teaching all of the Torah while standing on one foot. The more I study Torah, the more I realize that the lessons I learned from Rabbi Cahan over nearly fifty years really represent the most important lessons of our religion. These themes, which we shall encounter over and over again, already emerge in the beginning of Sefer Bereshis, before there were any Jews in the world.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Yaakov Tzvi ben Liba, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Noach: Window to the World

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2001

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Did you ever stop to imagine what life was like inside of Noah's ark? There were three floors; the middle floor was filled with a collection of the world's animals wild, domestic, and otherwise. Birds and critters of all shapes and sizes, vermin and an endless potpourri of creepy crawlers whose pesky descendants bear witness to their survival during that tempestuous period.

Then there was a floor of refuse. There was no recycling center, and no sewage system that I am aware of.

The humans had the top floor. Cramped in an inescapable living space was Noach, his three sons, their wives and one mother-in-law. I think the rest of the scenario can play clearly in our minds. Surely, it was far from easy. What intrigues are the detailed architectural commands that Hashem gave Noach. Hashem details measurements and design for an ark that took 120 years to build! Why? Are there lessons to be learned from the design of the design of the ark? After all, Hashem promised that there will be no more floods. If there are no more floods, then there need not be any more arks. So what

difference does it make how it was built. Obviously, there are inherent lessons we can learn from the design of the ark. Let's look at one.

Noach is told to build a window. It seems practical enough; after all sitting for an entire year can get awfully stuffy. So Noach is commanded to build a window for breathing room. It is a little troubling. Does Noach need a command to add something so simple as a window? Does it make a difference whether or not he had a window? Did that command have to be incorporated into the heavenly plans for an ark that would endure the ravaging flood?

A renowned Rosh Yeshiva, tragically lost his son to a debilitating disease at the prime of his life. Not long married, the son left a widow and a young child. The Rosh Yeshiva and his Rebbitzin were devastated at the loss and the shiva period was a most difficult time.

One of the hundreds of visitors was the Bluzhever Rebbe, Rabbi Yisrael Spira, whose entire family was wiped out during the Holocaust. He sat quietly, taking in the pain of the bereaved family. Finally, when it was time to say something, Rabbi Spira turned to the Rosh Yeshiva and spoke. "Your loss is terrible, but at least your son will have a living remnant, his child. He will also have a resting place and stone where the family can visit. I do not even know where any of my children who were killed by the Nazis are buried." Then he added, "yet somehow Hashem has given me the strength to rebuild my family and life." Those words truly helped console the Rosh Yeshiva.

Sometimes when we are locked in our little boxes, we, too, need a window. When we think our world is crumbling and that we are doomed to a fate that is too difficult to bear, Hashem tells us to make a window. Sometimes, in our frustrations we have to look across the globe, or even across the river to know that despite our difficulties, others must endure a more difficult fate. And when we realize that they can endure, whether it is an Og holding on the back of the ark, or struggling with those lost amongst the ruins, we can remember that life inside the ark is not so bad after all.

Good Shabbos!

Self-Restraint and Self-Contraction

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012, 2020

What was the sin of the Generation of the Flood? The verses repeat that they had "corrupted their way", which the Rabbis tell us refers to idolatry and sexual sin. And yet this is not what had sealed their fate, for the verse states: "The end of all flesh has come before Me, because the land is filled with hamas – understood by the Rabbis as "robbery" – through them." (6:13). "Said Rabbi Yochanan: Come and see how great is the sin of robbery. For the Generation of the Flood had transgressed everything, and yet their final decree was not sealed until they had engaged in robbery." (Sanhedrin 108).

Why robbery? Robbery, or at least its driving force, is perhaps the most basic violation, the evil that leads to all other evils. How is this true? The act of forcefully taking something that belongs to someone else is about seeing something that you want, and acting to satisfy your desire in disregard of the other person who has a rightful claim to the object. This, I would argue, is at the core of almost all other evildoing. There is only one person in the world that matters, and that is me. As long as I don't get caught, I am entitled to do anything I want to do to satisfy my desires, to serve my own interests. In short, it is about seeing everything outside of yourself as either an object of your desire or as an obstacle to your satisfying that desire.

Let us consider some of the sins leading up to the Flood. In the verse immediately preceding God's decision to bring the flood we are told, "And the benei ha'elohim, sons of the greats, saw the daughters of man, that they were comely, and they took for themselves wives from all that they chose." The women were objects of desire, these men who had power saw what they wanted and took it. What is rape and sexual abuse if not the turning of the other person into an object of your desire, to be taken without concern for the humanity of that other person? And what is adultery if not the treating of the other partner as merely an obstacle to the satisfying of your desires, an annoyance to be disregarded, to be lied to, to be dehumanized?

Going back further, we move from sexual sin to murder. Why did Cain kill Abel? The midrash tells us that it was about world domination.

What were they arguing about? They said: Come let us divide the world.... One said: The land on which you are standing is mine. The other replied: The clothes you are wearing are mine. One said: Take them off! The other said: Get off! In the course of this Cain rose up against Abel and killed him. (Breishit Rabba 22:16).

You have something I want, you are in my way, so I will kill you to get it. Now, according to the simple reading of the text, it was not a desire to own the world that motivated Cain, but jealousy of Abel as the favored of God. True, it is not always about property. Sometimes it is about honor, feeling good about yourself, not being made to feel unworthy. It still all boils down to the same thing. This other person is in my way, his very existence is a nuisance and an irritant to me. I am the only person who matters, ergo he must be killed. With such an attitude, Cain, in his killing of Abel, had actually achieved his goal – to live in a world where he was the only person who existed.

Ultimately this brings us back to the Creation story and first sin of humankind. In the Garden of Eden, Adam could have eaten from any tree he chose. Just one tree was off limits, was not his for the taking. The first sin, the primordial sin, was seeing, wanting, taking. "And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was desirous to the eyes... and she took from its fruit and she ate."

In this case, we are not talking about making space for another person. This is about making space for God. If God is in the world, and God has demands, then we need to pull back to make space for God, to respect God's presence. When we sin, to some degree we are treating God also as an object, as an obstacle to our self-gratification. When we sin, we push God out of the way, out of the world. "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I feared for I was naked, and I hid," says Adam to God. Until now, You were not in the garden with me. I was able to sin, because it was just me in the world and that which I wanted. Now that You are here, I must pull back.

Ultimately we are talking about tzimtzum. Not only about self-restraint, but about self-contraction. God created us in God's image. The first most obvious meaning of this is that we have the power to create, to control those things around us. And this is our first mandate "Subdue the earth and have dominion over it". To do such is to project ourselves into the world, just as God had done when God created the world. If this is all there is, however, then the world is nothing but us. No one else exists. I fill the world.

But creation was more than that. Part of creation was tzimtzum, God's contracting of Godself. Not only was this true before creation, in order to make space for creation to occur, but it was also a feature of the creation as well. When God came to create humans, God pulled back: "Let us create the human in our image." God made this a collaborative effort. And God created something that was not just an object. God created a person, a person who had will, who had free choice that even God could not, or would not, control. God created something in God's image; God created something very much like Godself.

When God created humans, God pulled back. When God created Eve, Adam pulled back. A part of Adam was removed from him, he was forced to shrink himself so that another person can exist. It is not coincidental that prior to the creation of Eve, Adam was commanded to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge. This command introduced the mandate of tzimtzum, demanded that he be like God not just in creating and dominating, but also in contracting, in acknowledging those outside himself, in making space for God. It is following this that Eve is created, that he is able to pull back to make space for another person, for Eve. Paradoxically, this pulling back did not make him less, but more. "Thus shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they will be as one flesh." When he cleaves to his wife as an equal, as "flesh of his flesh", as one equivalent to him, then it is not he who becomes one flesh, it is not the integrating of the other into oneself, but rather they who become one flesh. Having made space for the other, they both become whole.

A world that is all about you can be a pretty boring place. The richness, beauty, and dynamism that are part of creation come when we value others for themselves, not just as objects to satisfy our desires. God created humans by exhibiting tzimtzum. We create humans when we stop seeing the other as a projection of ourselves and our desires. We create humans by making space for the personhood, the humanity of the other.

The ultimate sin is, indeed, stealing. It is seeing, desiring and taking. It is seeing all others as objects. The remedy starts with the fundamental recognition of the humanity of the other. And thus, when the world starts over, God gives commandments to Noach. The two most explicit commandments are the prohibition of murder and of eating from animals when the life force is still in the blood. It is to respect human life, the divine image of every person. People are not objects,

and they cannot be treated as such. But not just people. Life must be so respected that even animals cannot be treated as objects. Our appetitive desires must be curbed in recognition of all life, even animal life.

We are thus set on a course that will hopefully lead to a better world, to a more just world. This starts with recognizing the humanity of those around us. And what about recognizing God's presence in the world? What about not pushing God out of our way, about the pulling back that is necessary because of what God has forbidden? The realization of this would have to wait until the next epoch of history, the choosing of Avraham whose mission it would be to spread God's name and to bring God into the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

Noach: The Children Are Watching

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2020 Teach 613

The quarantine was intense. Finally it was over, and Hashem instructed Noach to leave the Teiva (ark) in which he had been for over a year. Noach emerged; he certainly had great plans. He started by bringing offerings of thanksgiving and endearment. Hashem, in turn, declared a covenant that He would not bring another flood upon the world.

But then things went wrong. Noach, "the farmer," began his work, and he planted grapes. The Torah declares, "Vayochel Noach," Noach became "mundane." The great Noach, the man who was found worthy of being saved so that his family would reestablish humanity in the world, had lost his direction. As the Sages comment in wonderment, "Couldn't Noach have found anything besides a grapevine to start with?!" At that great time of blessing and opportunity following the destruction, couldn't he have found something beyond producing wine on which to focus his energies.

But it was not to be.

Noach's vineyard was miraculously successful, and, in short order, he had pressed the grapes, made wine, gotten drunk, and lay disgraced in his tent, where his son Cham found him.

To be fair, perhaps Noach was hoping to experience a spiritual vision, and wanted a cup of wine to "say Kiddush" on. On a more mundane level, perhaps Noach was deeply stressed from the quarantine—Teiva-- experience, and was hoping to drink a bit to unwind. No matter. It was in this disgraced, drunken state, that his children found him. Each child reacted in his own way. Notably, Cham capitalized on Noach's failure and disgrace. He looked; he noted; he reported. In contrast, Sheim came, assisted by Yefes, and backed into the room holding a covering, without looking. They covered their father's disgrace with great sensitivity.

"Go out of the Teiva," or "Reopening," as we call it, is a very challenging time. It is a complicated time as we try to open organizational life in a safe way. It can sometimes be a contentious time, as people have very different opinions of how to regulate things, and how to handle uptick indications. It is a time for which we have been waiting for months. Now that it seems to be here, we are quite ready to let loose, to let our guard down, and to have things quickly go back to our version of "normal."

One of the most important things to bear in mind is that we are living through some of the greatest Chinuch (education) moments of our lives. Our children are watching. The conduct we display, the language we use when we are angry or stressed, are all being recorded in the memory of the children for posterity.

There was a man who was eating dinner, and was called to the door by a neighbor. Before engaging his neighbor in conversation, he put on his mask. Later his child said to him, "Dad, it's not like you were in shul, or anything. Why did you put on your mask?" His father replied, "The mask isn't about shul, or even about you and me. The mask is a statement that we care. If we can limit the spread, then the people who are vulnerable will have a better chance to survive this."

There was a family that found out that they had been exposed to a person who tested positive for COVID. They quarantined, and Davened alone as a family. The daughter expected that Davening would be quick. Instead she noticed that her father was Davening with more exuberance, more heartfelt, and longer, than usual. She asked him about it. Her

father answered, “I lost the opportunity to Daven with a Minyan. But Davening with Kavana is something that I am still able to do.”

Indeed, our children know that we are up against a lot. For some, COVID has meant underemployment or worse. For others it has been a frustrating and distancing experience with so many rules and regulations. For most it has been stressful in one way or another. But if our children see us maintain our personal integrity and dignity despite the challenge, we will have lived up to what may be the most important Chinuch moments in their lives. Choosing carefully how we express ourselves when we are upset is critical. Navigating tough situations as “the adult in the room,” even as others may be childish or abusive, truly proclaims our dignity.

During the months of quarantine and even now, in the reopening, I sometimes find myself in need of a little break. In addition to walking, which I find quite helpful, I discovered that a few minutes with a “word-find” really helps to clear my mind.

But, what I noticed, is that besides a “word-find” being a quick diversion, it also has helped me grow in two important areas. One: If I found an almost-answer, that did not really match in all of its letters, I would have to reject it. It was not the correct answer. Two: Knowing that the “word-find” was intentionally created as a challenge, I remind myself that there is a solution. I must keep thinking and trying until I discover the correct solution.

Similarly in reopening, we, like Noach, need to realize that the stakes are high, and we are being watched. If a solution is just reactionary, but does not keep with our standards of decency, integrity, and dignity, then we need to find another way. There most certainly is a better way, because the challenge was tailor made by the Master Planner.

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Hebraism and Hellenism: Thoughts for Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

“May God enlarge Yefet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem” Bereishith 9:27.

In rabbinic tradition, Yefet and Shem—two sons of Noah—represent different civilizations. Yefet is identified with Greek culture, while Shem is identified with Jewish tradition. Yefet—whose name connects to the Hebrew word for beauty—symbolizes the Greek stress on aesthetics and philosophy. Shem symbolizes the life of religious belief and observance.

Over the course of the centuries, the civilizations of Yefet and Shem have had mixed relationships. The Hanukkah story reminds us of the antagonism between Hellenism and Judaism. Yet, the impact of Greek thought on Judaism has been profound, and especially so since the time of Moses Maimonides in the 12th century.

The great 19th century English literary figure, Matthew Arnold, wrote a chapter in his book *Culture and Anarchy*, which he entitled “Hebraism and Hellenism.” In a stereotypical manner, he averred that Hebraism stands for “strictness of conscience,” while Hellenism fosters “spontaneity of consciousness.” “The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience.” He goes on to assert that “as Hellenism speaks of thinking clearly, seeing things in their essence and beauty, as a grand and precious feat for man to achieve, so Hebraism speaks of becoming conscious of sin, of wakening to a sense of sin....” Arnold acknowledges that Hebraism i.e. obedience is 75% of life, and is responsible for maintaining a properly behaving society. And yet, he presents Hellenism as the 25% of life that actually involves clear thinking, appreciation of beauty, and freedom of imagination.

As religious Jews, we must ask ourselves: is our religious life mainly concerned with obedience? Does Arnold’s notion of Hebraism ring true to how we actually live our lives? Don’t we also have inquiring minds, aesthetic values, and spontaneity of consciousness? Is it fair—or even religiously healthy—for Hebraism to be isolated from the worldview of Hellenism?

To some, it does appear that Judaism can be reduced to obedience. The great Hebrew poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, lamented the negative turn in the religious life of his day in Eastern Europe: “Halakha has an angry face...Strict, severe, hard as steel—strict justice...[it] sets forth its ruling and leaves no room for differentiation: Its yes is Yes, its no is

No...fossilized piety, obligation, enslavement... (quoted by Zvi Zohar, "Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East, pp. 4-5). This critique is not entirely irrelevant even today in some circles.

On the other hand, there are those who are so enchanted with the worldview of Hellenism, that they downplay the role of obedience (i.e. mitzvoth) in Judaism. Yet, without the firm foundation of religious observance, Judaism can evaporate into religious-sounding platitudes. Without the commitment to daily religious observance, Judaism gradually fades away with the passing of generations.

The Talmud (Megillah 9b) cites an interpretation of the verse: May God enlarge Yefet and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem. "Said Rav Hiyya bar Abba: Yefet's beauty belongs in the tents of Shem." I believe that Rav Hiyya's statement provides a healthy view of Judaism. While firmly based in Torah and mitzvoth, it welcomes the beauty of Yefet into its tent.

Hebraism and Hellenism are not antithetical to each other. On the contrary, both worldviews need each other! Human beings need the spirituality and orderliness of Hebraism, as well as the intellectual freedom and love of beauty of Hellenism.

Our home base as Jews is Torah and mitzvoth. But for us to flourish fully in our humanity, we invite the beauty of Yefet into our home. We not only foster a "strictness of conscience," but also a "spontaneity of consciousness." Our goal is "to see things in their essence and beauty" while staying faithful to our spiritual natures.

It is a vast overstatement to restrict Hebraism to obedience, just as it is an extreme exaggeration to assert that Hellenism has a monopoly on seeing things as they really are. We gain as Jews—and as human beings—when we give due respect to a harmonious blend of the teachings of Yefet in the tents of Shem.

* Jewishideas.org. **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Musings on Intellectual Freedom: Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

I recently had some correspondence with a rabbinic colleague in which we discussed ideas relating to the role of women in halakha. I had offered some thoughts on how I imagined things would be in messianic times. He found my ideas somewhat interesting and then asked: do you have a source for them?

I replied: The source is my own thinking.

Our dialogue then reached a cordial conclusion.

I mulled over this conversation, and realized that it reflects some of the problems I have with much discussion within the Orthodox world. It is increasingly difficult to express an idea without pinning it to an "authority" or a reliable "source." Independent thinking is not considered to be good form.

If I had told my colleague that I had found my idea in a midrash, or a classic rabbinic work, or even in the writings of an obscure kabbalist...he would have taken my words more seriously. After all, I had a source!

But shouldn't ideas be evaluated on their own merit? A statement isn't truer if someone said it a few hundred years ago, even if that someone was a great scholar and sage. A statement is not less true if it is espoused by someone today, who has no "source" to substantiate his or her views.

Yes, certainly, we have a proper tendency to give more weight to the opinion of sages such as Rambam than the opinion of a person who is far less learned than Rambam. We assume that Rambam (or other “authority”) was surely wiser and more knowledgeable than we are; if early sources didn’t come up with our idea, then it must be that our idea is wrong...otherwise the previous “authorities” would have said it first.

But this line of thinking keeps us focused on the past, and doesn’t allow enough freedom to break new ground, to come up with novel ideas and approaches. It has been said that reliance on the authority of Aristotle kept philosophy from developing for a thousand years; reliance on the medical teachings of Galen kept medicine from advancing for many centuries. Whether in the sciences, arts or philosophy, innovation is a key to progress. An atmosphere of intellectual freedom allows ideas to be generated, evaluated, rejected, accepted...it provides the framework for human advancement.

It is intellectually deadening to read articles/responsa or hear lectures/shiurim that are essentially collections of the opinions of early “sources” and “authorities.” Although it is vital for rabbis and scholars to be aware of the earlier rabbinic literature, it is also vital that they not be hemmed in by those opinions. One needs the intellectual freedom to evaluate sources, to accept what is deemed acceptable, to reject what is objectionable...and to offer one’s own views on the topic, even if no earlier source/authority exists.

Oh yes, I have a source for these views!

Rambam wrote (*Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:13): *“For when something has been demonstrated, the correctness of the matter is not increased and certainty regarding it is not strengthened by the consensus of all men of knowledge with regard to it. Nor could its correctness be diminished and certainty regarding it be weakened even if all the people on earth disagreed with it.”* Rambam also noted (*Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Kiddush Hahodesh* 17:24): *“Since all these rules have been established by sound and clear proofs, free from any flaw and irrefutable, we need not be concerned about the identity of their authors, whether they be Hebrew prophets or gentile sages.”* *We rely on the proofs, not on the credentials of the author.*

Some years ago, I wrote an article “Orthodoxy and Diversity,” in which I expressed my concerns. “Orthodoxy needs to foster the love of truth. It must be alive to different intellectual currents, and receptive to open discussion. How do we, as a modern Orthodox community, combat the tendency toward blind authoritarianism and obscurantism?

First, we must stand up and be counted on the side of freedom of expression. We, as a community, must give encouragement to all who have legitimate opinions to share. We must not tolerate intolerance. We must not yield to the tactics of coercion and intimidation.

Our schools and institutions must foster legitimate diversity within Orthodoxy. We must insist on intellectual openness, and resist efforts to impose conformity: we will not be fitted into the bed of Sodom. We must give communal support to diversity within the halakhic framework, so that people will not feel intimidated to say things publicly or sign their names to public documents.”
(Here’s the link to that article: <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/orthodoxy-and-diversity>)

When well-reasoned views are expressed, they should be evaluated fairly. Quoting “sources/authorities” does not in itself validate an opinion. Not quoting “sources/authorities” does not invalidate an opinion.

We certainly should draw on the wisdom and scholarship of others, and we should give them due credit when we learn from them and quote their words. But we should not shut off our own brains, nor feel unable to express an opinion without basing it on an earlier source. A thinking Judaism makes us better Jews...and better human beings.

* Jewishideas.org.

Parshas Noach

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Our parsha begins with G-d instructing Noach to build a large three-story ark to prepare for a flood which G-d will bring in one hundred and twenty years to wipe away humanity. Rash"i asks why Hashem wanted Noach to toil so long and so hard? He explains that G-d's intent was to avert the flood by inspiring the people of Noach's generation to repent. When they would see Noach working on this huge project, they would surely ask what he was doing. This would give Noach plenty of opportunity to explain how humanity had abandoned G-d's intent for the world, and that G-d is planning to bring a flood that will wipe out all life on land. Perhaps, hearing and seeing Noach over the next one hundred and twenty years would be enough inspiration to bring them to change their ways and would avert the pending decree of destruction. (Bereishis 7:14)

Following this thought, the Chizkuni (ibid.) explains that this is why G-d instructs Noach to build the Ark out of gopher wood. The word גַּפֵּר – "gopher" comes from the Hebrew word גַּפְרִית – "gafris" meaning sulfur, and the wood was named for its sulfuric content. Hashem wanted Noach to use the sulfuric wood to visibly show the people of Noach's time the judgement they were worthy of for their immoral and destructive ways. In His infinite love and concern for humanity, G-d offered this added warning while Noach was building the Ark, in the hope that this would lead them to change their ways and would save humanity.

The simple reading of the Chizkuni is a beautiful and powerful thought, and one well worth contemplation. The Chizkuni explains (ibid. 11) that the generation was so deeply entrenched in their thievery and immorality that it was a communal effort. For example, when a person was carrying a basket of produce to sell, each person would take an amount too small to be judged in court. In this way they would collectively take his entire basket without anyone having to pay a cent. Even a generation so openly and collectively committed to evil still held G-d's love and compassion, and G-d made every effort to inspire them to repent.

In addition to this beautiful thought, I believe there is an instructive lesson we can glean for our own growth and inspiration. If we consider the context, it is rather difficult to understand the significance of the sulfuric wood. These people would see Noach building the large Ark for over a century. The entire time, he would be warning of the pending destruction to anyone who asked. If they were to ignore Noach's warnings, what difference would it make that Noach was using sulfuric wood? If they did not take Noach seriously, then the use of sulfuric wood should have appeared as nothing more than Noach's own private joke.

I believe the answer lies in the words of the Chizkuni. He says the purpose of the gopher wood was to "show" the generation of the judgement they deserved. They could easily view Noach's words as the thoughts of a fool, or an alarmist. However, seeing the sulfur could help focus them in on Noach's words. When they saw the sulfuric wood, the physical imagery of sulphur before their eyes could catch their attention and could cause them to stop and consider Noach's words a little more carefully and thereby take Noach more seriously.

We see a similar idea in Rash"i. Rash"i learns that the intended inspiration was not from the sulfuric nature of the wood, but simply from the name of the wood. When they saw the wood, the word "gopher" would slip through their mind. This could lead them to think of "gaphris" – sulfur, because of the similar sound. Hearing the word "sulfur" in their mind could also cause them to pause and consider Noach's words.

Our physical senses are powerful tools we can use to our advantage. In any area of life, engaging our physical senses can deepen our focus and thereby increase our inspiration. Many of the mitzvos involve physical actions which help focus our thoughts and our hearts. A little more inspiration and focus, can potentially lead to significant changes. Sometimes, that added inspiration could even save the world.

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What Caused the Great Flood?

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Nothing beats the story of Noah and the Great Flood. With all the talk going on this time of year about the fate of our society, we now will read the story of a society that suffered the consequences of their actions by dissolving in water.

But why? What was the internal rot eating at man's core that caused God to reconsider his decision to create man? This story was preserved to teach us something. To communicate to us how certain behaviors and attitudes that when adopted are particularly harmful for us. So what are they?

Thankfully, the Torah does not play games and explicitly tells us the problem. Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 11 states: "Vatishaches Haaretz Lifnei Haelokim Vatimale Haaretz Chamas." The world was corrupt before God for it was filled with Chamas.

What is Chamas? It sounds like a certain group that torments the Jewish people. Certainly if the world was filled with them, the world would be a terrible place to live. But that's not the meaning here.

Chamas, loosely translated, means robbery. People stole from each other and if you had greater strength, you could steal from the weak. Earlier the Torah describes those in royalty using their power to take women from whomever they wished (even married women). So perhaps this was the issue here. However, this interpretation does not hold up.

If this was simply a matter of the strong oppressing the weak why would God destroy the whole world? He should just destroy those that abuse their power. Why hold everyone accountable and have the weak die as well in this huge cataclysmic event?

This question led our rabbinic commentators to conclude that this was not the whole story. They claim that Chamas doesn't just mean robbery. It means robbery you can legally get away with.

The Generation of the Flood would steal from each other in such small amounts that it wasn't legally feasible to sue them in court. Things like tasting a grape from a fruit stand or using someone's pen without permission. Things like this only "rob" someone of a few cents and could not be pursued legally in their courts. In America at least, you'd lose more on the court filing fee than what you had lost in the robbery.

So the problem was not highway robbery that only the strong and evil could do. The problem was everyone had a complete lack of respect for private property and recognizing the rights of others. They had no conception that this other person was made in the image of God. So if they could get away with it they did it. This was something even the weak could do. The law replaced morality and basic human decency instead of supplementing it.

Elections are all about electing lawmakers. But laws are inadequate on their own to heal ourselves and society. Robbery and bad behavior can be legal if you hire the right lawyers. According to the Torah, what really matters is how we behave when we can get away with it.

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah Noah: Gathering Within the Ark

Why an Ark?

Why was it necessary for Noah to build an ark to save his family from the Flood's destruction? Could God not have arranged an easier way to rescue him?

The Midrash raises this question, explaining that the 120 years that Noah worked constructing the enormous boat were meant to provide the people of his generation with an opportunity to repent.

Rebuilding the World

Eighteenth-century scholar Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto offered an alternative explanation to that of the Midrash. He wrote that Noah needed to spend a year living inside the ark in order to prepare the foundations of a new world. Outside the ark, where flood waters swept away the world's evil, nothing could survive. Inside the ark, the inner integrity of the world was reestablished under Noah's direction. The soul of this great tzaddik encompassed all the souls of the world. As Noah fed and looked after the animals in his care, he renewed the world on the basis of goodness and kindness.

A similar preparatory stage of spiritual renewal took place many generations later. Before the revelation of the Zohar, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai spent thirteen years hiding in a cave. He needed this period of seclusion to purify and prepare himself for the Zohar's inner light (Adir BaMarom 7).

The Path of Personal Growth

This same method, Rav Kook wrote, is necessary for our own moral and spiritual growth. Change is difficult. It is not easy to correct old habits and patterns of thought. As human beings, we become accustomed to looking at life in terms of fulfilling our material needs, which can lead us to drift unthinkingly into self-centered pursuit of honor and physical pleasures.

The path to repairing one's deeds and refining one's character has two aspects. The first step is cognitive. We must fully understand each trait and its characteristics, and we must learn the proper time and place for their expression. Therefore our first request in the daily Amidah prayer is that God "grant us knowledge, understanding, and insight."

Theoretical knowledge, however, is not enough. After acquiring this wisdom, we must accustom our will to wholeheartedly conform to this new path. We must strive to quiet our heart's desires and distance ourselves from all that leads to a confused state of mind — a state that undermines the very foundations of character-building. We need to acquire a resolute and steadfast outlook and fortify our traits so that we will be able to retain our purity and holiness even when occupied in worldly matters.

A Private Ark

Those who succeed in directing their mind and inner will in this fashion will gain control of all aspects of their lives. Those who have not carefully thought out their path, however, will lack control of their actions and desires. Such individuals need to withdraw the powers of the soul, their strengths and talents, and gather them in, like lines radiating outward that are pulled back to their focal point.

This undertaking is similar to Noah's confinement within the ark. It can be a bitter and heavy burden to constrain the soul's powers in such a way, since the soul naturally seeks independence and freedom. Even confinement in the body is a terrible prison for the soul; all the more so to be constrained in such a fashion.

Converging toward the nucleus of one's mind and inner will is not a pleasant task. One may feel pained and even depressed from the constraints of this path of repair. But after the soul's forces have become accustomed to conducting themselves properly, they may be allowed to return to their natural state. Then all aspects of one's personality will be proper vessels for fulfilling God's will, and one's powers may be released to rule over the body once more, now following the dictates of the intellect.

This path of personal renewal parallels the world's renewal in the time of Noah. The months spent in the ark were a preparatory period of converging and gathering powers under the direction of the tzaddik. But when the punishing waters receded and the inhabitable dry land appeared, the ark's inhabitants could be freed from their confinement. So too, as character traits are repaired and perfected, they may be released once again.

Testing the Waters

During the period of confinement, one needs to "test the waters" — to measure whether one's powers are ready to be set

free. This stage corresponds to Noah's sending out the raven and the dove. One tests one's traits in matters that do not involve danger, just as Noah utilized birds — creatures that can fly and thus were not endangered by the flood waters. When Noah realized that the world's repair was not yet complete, he drew them back into the ark.

The Divine command, "Leave the ark!" came only when the land was completely dry. Then it was time to serve God in an unhindered manner, for the active dissemination of Torah and acts of kindness requires an unfettered soul, full of strength and courage.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mussar Avicha, pp. 33-39.)

The Courage to Live with Uncertainty (Noach 5776)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

Please remember Yaakov Tzvi ben Liba for a Mishebarach!

For each of us there are milestones on our spiritual journey that change the direction of our life and set us on a new path. For me one such moment came when I was a rabbinical student at Jews' College and thus had the privilege of studying with one of the great rabbinic scholars of our time, Rabbi Dr Nachum Rabinovitch.

He was, and is, a giant: one the most profound Maimonidean scholars of the modern age, equally at home with virtually every secular discipline as with the entire rabbinic literature, and one of the boldest and independent of poskim, as his several published volumes of Responsa show. He also showed what it was to have spiritual and intellectual courage, and that in our time has proved, sadly, all too rare.

The occasion was not special. He was merely giving us one of his regular divrei Torah. The week was parshat Noach. But the Midrash he quoted to us was extraordinary. In fact it is quite hard to find. It appears in the book known as Buber's Tanhuma, published in 1885 by Martin Buber's grandfather Shlomo from ancient manuscripts. It is a very early text — some say as early as the fifth century — and it has some overlap with an ancient Midrash of which we no longer have the full text known as Midrash Yelamdenu.

The text is in two parts, and it is a commentary on God's words to Noah: "Then God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark'" (Gen. 8:16). On this the Midrash says: "Noah said to himself, Since I only entered the ark with permission (from God), shall I leave without permission? The Holy One blessed be He said, to him: Are you looking for permission? In that case I give you permission, as it says, 'Then God said to Noah, Come out of the ark.'"

The Midrash then adds: "Said Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, If I had been there I would have smashed down [the doors of] the ark and taken myself out of it." [1]

The moral Rabbi Rabinovitch drew — indeed the only one possible — was that when it comes to rebuilding a shattered world, you do not wait for permission. God gives us permission. He expects us to go on ahead.

This was, of course, part of an ancient tradition, mentioned by Rashi in his commentary (to Gen. 6:9), and central to the sages' understanding of why God began the Jewish people not with Noah but with Abraham. Noah, says the Torah, "walked with God" (6:9). But God said to Abraham, "Walk on ahead of Me ..." (Gen. 17:1). So the point was not new, but the drama and power of the Midrash were stunning.

Suddenly I understood that this is a significant part of what faith is in Judaism: to have the courage to pioneer, to do something new, to take the road less travelled, to venture out into the unknown. That is what Abraham and Sarah had done when they left their land, their home and their father's house. It is what the Israelites did in the days of Moses when they journeyed forth into the wilderness, guided only by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

Faith is precisely the courage to take a risk, knowing that "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4). It took faith to challenge the religions of the ancient world, especially when they were embodied in the greatest empires of their time. It took faith to stay Jewish in the Hellenistic age, when Jews and Judaism must have seemed small and parochial when set against the cosmopolitan culture of ancient Greece and the

Alexandrian empire.

It took the faith of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla to build, already in the first century, the world's first ever system of universal, compulsory education (Baba Batra 21a), and the faith of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to realise that Judaism could survive the loss of independence, land and Temple, on the basis of an academy of scholars and a culture of scholarship.

In the modern age, even though many of Jewry's most distinguished minds either lost or abandoned their faith, nonetheless that ancient reflex survived. How else are we to understand the phenomenon that a tiny minority in Europe and the United States was able to produce so many shapers of the modern mind, each of them a pioneer in his or her own way: Einstein in physics, Durkheim in sociology, Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Mahler and Schoenberg in music, and a whole string of innovative economists from David Ricardo (the law of comparative advantage) to John von Neumann (Game Theory) to Milton Friedman (monetary theory), to Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (behavioural economics).

They dominated the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, from Freud and his circle to Viktor Frankl (Logotherapy), Aaron T. Beck (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and Martin Seligman (Positive Psychology). The pioneers of Hollywood and film were almost all Jewish. Even in popular music the achievement is stunning, from Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, masters of the American musical, to Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, the two supreme poets of popular music in the twentieth century.

In many cases – such is the fate of innovators – the people concerned had to face a barrage of criticism, disdain, opposition or disregard. You have to be prepared to be lonely, at best misunderstood, at worst vilified and defamed. As Einstein said, "If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare me a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German, and Germany will declare that I am a Jew." To be a pioneer – as Jews know from our history – you have to be prepared to spend a long time in the wilderness.

That was the faith of the early Zionists. They knew early on, some from the 1860s, others after the pogroms of the 1880s, Herzl after the Dreyfus trial, that European Enlightenment and Emancipation had failed, that despite its immense scientific and political achievements, mainland Europe still had no place for the Jew. Some Zionists were religious, others were secular, but most importantly they all knew what the Midrash Tanhuma made so clear: when it comes to rebuilding a shattered world or a broken dream, you don't wait for permission from Heaven. Heaven is telling you to go ahead.

That is not carte blanche to do whatever we like. Not all innovation is constructive. Some can be very destructive indeed. But this principle of "Walk on ahead", the idea that the Creator wants us, His greatest creation, to be creative, is what makes Judaism unique in the high value it places on the human person and the human condition.

Faith is the courage to take a risk for the sake of God or the Jewish people; to begin a journey to a distant destination knowing that there will be hazards along the way, but knowing also that God is with us, giving us strength if we align our will with His. Faith is not certainty, but the courage to live with uncertainty.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Midrash seems to be based on the fact that this is the first verse in the Torah where the verb d-b-r (to speak) is used. The root a-m-r (to say) has a similar meaning but there is a slight difference between them. D-b-r usually implies speaking harshly, judgmentally. See also Ibn Ezra ad loc, who senses from the text that Noah was reluctant to leave the ark.

Shabbat Shalom.

* <https://rabbisacks.org/the-courage-to-live-with-uncertainty/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

What Happened to Noah's Ark?

By Yehuda Shurpin*

We read in the Bible how, at the end of the Great Flood, the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (which some identify as the Armenian Highlands). Since the Torah doesn't ascribe any intrinsic holiness to Noah's Ark, it is not at all surprising that once Noah left it, there isn't any real discussion about what happened to it. Yet, throughout the ages, the location of Noah's Ark has been a subject of fascination, with some even claiming to have found it.

While the Ark may not have survived until the present day, the Talmud and Midrash assert that it was still in existence thousands of years after the Great Flood.

Sennacherib's Deity

In the Book of II Kings we read that Sennacherib, King of Assyria, dwelt in Nineveh after his armies were destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem: "He was prostrating himself in the temple of Nisroch, his god, and Adramelech and Sharezer, his sons, slew him with a sword, and they fled to the land of Ararat, and his son Esarhaddon reigned in his stead."¹

Expounding upon this, the Talmud explains that "Nisroch" is linked to the word *neser*, "beam," and refers to a beam from Noah's Ark.² When Sennacherib found a beam from the Ark, he proclaimed, "This must be the great god that saved Noah from the Flood!" He then addressed the beam-deity and pledged, "If I go to war and am victorious, I will offer my two sons as a sacrifice before you!" His sons overheard this and decided to kill him.

Interestingly, Josephus, in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, claimed to have known the whereabouts of Noah's Ark and quoted earlier historians (including the 3rd century BCE Berosus the Chaldean) as saying that people would take parts of the Ark to use as amulets to ward off evil.³

Haman's Gallows

A little less than 200 years after Sennacherib, during the story of Purim, Haman built a gallows "50 cubits high" (approximately 75 feet) with the intention of hanging Mordechai upon it. One tradition in the Midrash⁴ tells us that one of Haman's children was the governor of the province where Noah's Ark was located, and he provided Haman with a beam from the Ark, which was 50 cubits wide.⁵

Why Did the Ark Survive?

David sings in Psalms that God makes "a memorial for His wonders"⁶ so that people remember His miracles and sing His praise. The commentaries explain that this is why remnants of the Ark were preserved.

It was divinely orchestrated that Haman used wood from the Ark to build the gallows that he himself would ultimately be hung on. For the same wood that was used to save the remnants of humanity was once again used to save the Jewish people.⁷

FOOTNOTES:

1. II Kings 19:37.
2. Talmud, Sanhedrin 96a.
3. See *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.3.6.
4. See *Yalkut Shimoni*, Esther, 1056.
5. Genesis 6:15.
6. Psalms 111:4.

7. See Manot HaLevi on Esther 5:14.

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Noach: See No Evil

An Insight from the Lubavitcher Rebbe*

And Shem and Yefet took the garment, and placed it on both of their shoulders. They walked backwards, and they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned backwards, and they did not see their father's nakedness. Noach 9:23.

You See what You Need to See

The Baal Shem Tov taught: Flaws that you see in someone else are a reflection of your own imperfections. G-d leads us to notice these shortcomings in someone else, for our own deficiencies in that particular area would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

This "chance discovery," says the Baal Shem Tov, is not only about helping your friend; there's something in it for you too, it brings attention to the areas in which you too could use critique and improvement. The incident of Shem and Yefet protecting their father's honor alludes to this idea. The Torah relates that when Noach was drunk and lying naked in his tent, Shem and Yefet entered backward, so as not to see their father's nakedness, and they covered him. Now, the Torah states that Shem and Yefet faced backward, in which case they obviously couldn't see their father, who lay naked in front of them.

Nevertheless, the verse emphasizes that Shem and Yefet "did not see their father's nakedness." In other words, not only did they not see their father naked since they faced the opposite direction, they also did not "see" his nakedness and shame; all they saw was a situation that demanded their assistance.

-- From: Lightpoints *

* Newly published teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the weekly Torah portion.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Righteousness is not Leadership

The praise accorded to Noah is unparalleled in Tanach. He was, says the Torah, “a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God.” No such praise is given to Abraham or Moses or any of the Prophets. The only person in the Bible who comes close is Job, described as “blameless and upright (tam ve-yashar); he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Noah is in fact the only individual that the Tanach describes as righteous (tzaddik).

Yet the Noah we see at the end of his life is not the person we saw at the beginning. After the Flood:

Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. (Gen. 9:20-23)

The man of God has become a man of the soil. The upright man has become a drunkard. The man clothed in virtue now lies naked. The man who saved his family from the Flood is now so undignified that two of his sons are ashamed to look at him. This is a tale of decline. Why?

Noah is the classic case of someone who is righteous, but who is not a leader. In a disastrous age, when all has been corrupted, when the world is filled with violence, when even God Himself – in the most poignant line in the whole Torah – “regretted that He had made man on earth, and was pained to His very core,” Noah alone justifies God’s faith in humanity, the faith that led Him to create humankind in the first place. That is an immense achievement, and nothing should detract from it. Noah is, after all, the man through whom God makes a covenant with all humanity. Noah is to humanity what Abraham is to the Jewish people.

Noah was a good man in a bad age. But his influence on the life of his contemporaries was, apparently, non-existent. That is implicit in God’s statement, “You alone have I found righteous in this whole generation” (Gen. 7:1). It is implicit also in the fact that only Noah and his family, together with the animals, were saved. It is reasonable to assume that these two facts – Noah’s righteousness and his lack of

influence on his contemporaries – are intimately related. Noah preserved his virtue by separating himself from his environment. That is how, in a world gone mad, he stayed sane.

The famous debate among the Sages as to whether the phrase “perfect in his generations” (Gen. 6:9) is praise or criticism may well be related to this. Some said that “perfect in his generations” means that he was perfect only relative to the low standard then prevailing. Had he lived in the generation of Abraham, they said, he would have been insignificant. Others said the opposite: if in a wicked generation Noah was righteous, how much greater he would have been in a generation with role models like Abraham.

The argument, it seems to me, turns on whether Noah’s isolation was part of his character, or whether it was merely the necessary tactic in that time and place. If he were naturally a loner, he would not have gained by the presence of heroes like Abraham. He would have been impervious to influence, whether for good or bad. If he was not a loner by nature but merely by circumstance, then in another age he would have sought out kindred spirits and become greater still.

Yet what exactly was Noah supposed to do? How could he have been an influence for good in a society bent on evil? Was he really meant to speak in an age when no one would listen? Sometimes people do not listen even to the voice of God Himself. We had an example of this just two chapters earlier, when God warned Cain of the danger of his violent feelings toward Abel – “Why are you so furious? Why are you depressed?... sin is crouching at the door. It lusts after you, but you can dominate it” (Gen. 4:6-7). Yet Cain did not listen, and instead went on to murder his brother. If God speaks and people do not listen, how can we criticise Noah for not speaking when all the evidence suggests that they would not have listened to him anyway?

The Talmud raises this very question in a different context, in another lawless age: the years leading to the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple, another lawless age:

Aha b. R. Hanina said: Never did a favourable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following, where it is written, “And the Lord said unto him: Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the

foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are being done in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 9:4).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, “Go and set a mark of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them.” Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, “Sovereign of the Universe! How are these different from those?”

“Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked,” He replied. “Sovereign of the Universe!” said Justice, “They had the power to protest but did not.”

Said God, “Had they protested, they would not have heeded them.”

“Sovereign of the Universe!” said Justice, “This was revealed to You, but was it revealed to them?” (Shabbat 55a)

According to this passage, even the righteous in Jerusalem were punished at the time of the destruction of the Temple because they did not protest the actions of their contemporaries. God objects to the claim of Justice: Why punish them for their failure to protest when it was clear that had they done so, no one would have listened? Justice replies: This may be clear to you or to the angels – meaning, this may be clear in hindsight – but at the time, no human could have been sure that their words would have no impact. Justice asks: How can you be sure you will fail if you never try?

The Talmud notes that God reluctantly agreed with Justice. Hence the strong principle: when bad things are happening in society, when corruption, violence and injustice prevail, it is our duty to register a protest, even if it seems likely that it will have no effect. Why? Because that is what moral integrity demands. Silence may be taken as acceptance. And besides, we can never be sure that no one will listen. Morality demands that we ignore probability and focus on possibility. Perhaps someone will take notice and change their ways – and that “perhaps” is enough.

This idea did not suddenly appear for the first time in the Talmud. It is stated explicitly in the

book of Ezekiel. This is what God says to the Prophet:

"Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against Me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a Prophet has been among them." (Ezek. 2:3-5)

God is telling the Prophet to speak, regardless of whether people will listen.

So, one way of reading the story of Noah is as an example of lack of leadership. Noah was righteous but not a leader. He was a good man who had no influence on his environment. There are, to be sure, other ways of reading the story, but this seems to me the most straightforward. If so, then Noah is the third case in a series of failures of responsibility. As we saw last week, Adam and Eve failed to take personal responsibility for their actions ("It wasn't me"). Cain refused to take moral responsibility ("Am I my brother's keeper?"). Noah failed the test of collective responsibility.

This way of interpreting the story, if correct, entails a strong conclusion. We know that Judaism involves collective responsibility, for it teaches *Kol Yisrael arevim ze bazeinu* ("All Israel are responsible for one another" Shavuot 39a). But it may be that simply being human also involves collective responsibility. Not only are Jews responsible for one another. So are we all, regardless of our faith or religious affiliations. So, at any rate, Maimonides argued, though Nahmanides disagreed.[1]

The Hassidim had a simple way of making this point. They called Noah a *tzaddik im peltz*, "a righteous man in a fur coat." There are essentially two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a thick coat, or you can light a fire. Wear a coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you can warm others too. We are supposed to light a fire.

Noah was a good man who was not a leader. Was he, after the Flood, haunted by guilt? Did he think of the lives he might have saved if only he had spoken out, whether to his contemporaries or to God? We cannot be sure. The text is suggestive but not conclusive.

It seems, though, that the Torah sets a high standard for the moral life. It is not enough to be righteous if that means turning our backs on a society that is guilty of wrongdoing. We must take a stand. We must protest. We must register dissent even if the probability of changing minds is small. That is because the moral life is a life we share with others. We are, in some sense, responsible for the society of which we are a part. It is not enough to be good. We must

encourage others to be good. There are times when each of us must lead.

[1] See Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Melachim* 9:14. Also see Ramban, *Commentary to Bereishit* 34:13, s.v. *Ve-rabbim*.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Haran died before his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim." (Gen. 11:28) When it comes to questions of belief, the agnostic is the loneliest of all. On one side of the fence stands the atheist, confident in his rejection of God and often dedicated to the debunking of religion, which he considers to be 'the opiate of the masses' (per Karl Marx). On the other side stands the believer, who glories in his faith that the universe is the handiwork of God. The agnostic stands in the middle, not knowing (a-gnost) whether or not God exists, usually despairing of the possibility of acquiring certitude about anything transcending observable material phenomena.

Our Biblical portion makes reference to two very different agnostics, Haran and Noah. The contrast between them contains an important lesson for agnostics, believers and atheists, alike.

The Bible states that Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and sons' wives, went into the ark "because of the waters of the Flood" (Gen. 7:7). From this verse, Rashi derives that "Noah had little faith; he believed and he didn't believe that the Flood would arrive."

Noah didn't enter the ark until the water literally pushed him in. Rashi's phrase that "he believed and he didn't believe" is really another way of describing an agnostic who remains in the state of his uncertainty; he believes and doesn't believe. Noah is therefore described by Rashi as the first agnostic.

The second Biblical agnostic appears in the guise of Haran. "These are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (Gen. 11:27).

Why does the text specify "and Haran died before his father in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim" (Ibid. v. 28)? What is the significance of citing the exact place of Haran's death?

Rashi explains by citing a fascinating midrashic tradition, and at the same time extracts Haran from relative anonymity, setting him up as a counterfoil agnostic to Noah. This midrash details how Terah, the father of the clan and a famous idol manufacturer, brings charges in the court of King Nimrod against his own son. He accuses Abram of being an iconoclast who destroyed his father's idols while preaching heretical monotheism. As punishment, Abram is to be cast into the fiery furnace.

Haran is present at the trial and takes the position of having no position. He remains on

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the sidelines thinking that if Nimrod's furnace will prove hotter than Abram's flesh, he will side with the king; but if Abram survives the fire, then it would be clear that Abram's God is more powerful than Nimrod's gods, and he will throw in his lot with his brother.

Only after Abram emerges unscathed, is Haran ready to rally behind his brother. He confidently enters the fiery furnace (literally: Ur Kasdim), but no miracles await him. Haran burns to death.

Is it not strange that the fate of the two agnostics should be so different? We read how Noah was a man of little faith, and yet not only does he survive the Flood, he turns into one of the central figures of human history. He is even termed "righteous" in the Bible.

In contrast, Haran, father of Lot, brother to Abraham, hovers on the edge of obscurity, and is even punished with death for his lack of faith. Why is Haran's agnosticism considered so much worse than Noah's?

Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z"l, explained that while Noah and Haran shared uncertainty about God, there was a vast difference between them. Noah, despite his doubts, nevertheless builds the ark, pounding away for 120 years, even suffering abuse from a world ridiculing his eccentric persistence. Noah may not have entered the ark until the rains began—but he did not wait for the Flood before obeying the divine command to build an ark!

Noah may think like an agnostic, but he acts like a believer. Haran, on the other hand, dies because he waits for someone else to test the fires. In refusing to act for God during Abram's trial, he acted against God. In effect, his indecision is very much a decision. He is an agnostic who acts like an atheist.

Indecision is also a decision. A person who is indecisive about protesting an evil action or a malicious statement is aiding and abetting that malevolence by his very indecisive silence. After all, our sages teach that "silence is akin to assent."

Noah reached his spiritual level because he acted, not so much out of faith, but despite his lack of it. Our Sages understood very well the difficulty of faith and the phenomenon of agnosticism. What they attempt to teach the agnostic is: If you are unsure, why do you act as if you are an atheist? Would it not be wiser to act as if you were a believer?

We learn from Noah's life and Haran's death that perfect faith is not necessary in order to conduct one's life. Belief is never as important as action. In the World to Come, there is room for all kinds of agnostics. It depends primarily on how they acted on earth.

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Easy Spirituality

The French poet Baudelaire once remarked that the devil's greatest success is his ability to convince us that he does not exist.

Whereas Judaism does not believe in the devil quite as Baudelaire does, it does believe that there is a "devilish" force called the yetzer hara within each of us, and that that force works in very subtle ways. At the same time, with ambivalence, we definitely do tend to believe that this yetzer does not exist.

Jewish writings through the ages have debated the nature of this force. All these writings ultimately trace back to a verse in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Noach: "The devising of man's mind are evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21)

And to a similar verse in last week's Torah portion: "The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5)

Thus, there most assuredly is an inclination for evil in each of us. He or she who wishes to live the life of a good person is well advised to guard against this natural inclination. This yetzer-force rarely commands us directly to do what is wrong. Instead, it tries to craftily delude us into thinking that what is wrong and evil is right and good.

A favorite strategy for the yetzer is to persuade us that it seeks the same ends and objectives as God does, but that alternate ways of achieving those ends are also legitimate. Take spirituality, for example. How does one achieve a sense of spirituality?

For Judaism, spirituality and the emotions which accompany it can only be achieved through hard work: prayer, study, sacrifice, and above all, charity and compassion. No easy "grace!" The yetzer, while not denying the value of spirituality, tempts us with short cuts, and cheap and ersatz methods to achieve the same results as the more arduous methods prescribed by the Torah.

A wonderful illustration of this dynamic is found in this week's Torah portion, just after the story of the great Flood. Noah and his family are beginning anew, rebuilding their lives, rebuilding the world. What is the first thing Noah does? He plants a vineyard. His grapes grow and ripen, he makes wine and drinks it and gets drunk.

What prompted Noah to make wine his first priority? Let me suggest the following imaginary scenario to answer that question. Noah walked with God. He enjoyed the sense of spirituality for which many of us yearn. He experienced a spiritual "high." In the past, he achieved that level of spirituality by virtue of

hard work: obedience, construction of the Ark, gathering the animals of the world, tending to them, offering sacrifices. Along came Noah's yetzer-force, and said, "Noah! There must be an easier way! You can achieve the same spiritual high, the same sense of wholeness and holiness without all that work. All it will take is a few drinks of one of God's own juices. Plant a vineyard, make some wine and drink it and you will feel all the good feelings you felt before, and then some."

For, you see, the yetzer, or if you wish the devil, knows of the connection between addiction and spirituality.

How well I remember the 1960s, and the many gifted spiritual seekers who resorted to alcohol and more potent substances to generate moods of spirituality.

Judaism cautions us not to be seduced by facile techniques, even in the service of achieving higher and holier states of conscientiousness. That is why the Torah shifts next week into the story of Abraham, whose spirituality was based on service, on the courageous search for social justice, and on compassionate concern for others in need. In short, Abraham was dedicated to the very arduous methods that Noah sought to circumvent by drink.

Join us next week as we examine the impressive personality of Abraham and learn from him how to achieve a sober sense of spirituality.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Retirement: A Concept Introduced by Noach for Noahides

The Medrash Shochar Tov in Tehillim says that three righteous individuals were the foundation of the earth. Adam, Noach, and Avraham. There is an expression that is used all too commonly. We refer to a person as a "Tzadik Yesod Olam" [A righteous person, foundation of the world]. There are plenty of righteous people, but the accolade "Tzadik Yesod Olam" is a very specific title referring to a very special type of righteous person: A Tzadik who is literally "the foundation of the world."

The world rests, so to speak, on the shoulders of such a Tzadik. Today there has been inflation in many areas. There is "grade inflation" in schools. Everything is inflated. Today, coming three times a day to daven with a minyan already seems to qualify a person as a "Tzadik Yesod Olam." This is an overstated exaggeration that cheapens a title that should be reserved for truly unique individuals. The Medrash says only the three aforementioned people deserve this title: Adam, Noach, and Avraham.

The Almighty created the world. He had envisioned that the world would come to perfection through the First Man. Adam was a "Tzadik Yesod Olam." Unfortunately, as we all know, within the first day of his creation,

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Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and the potential that was within him for the perfection of the universe went by the wayside.

The Almighty waited ten generations. There is a connection between the "Ten Generations" and the "Ten Utterances" with which the world was created. He waited ten generations to come up with another individual who had the potential to be the "Tzadik Yesod Olam"—the righteous individual upon whom the world would rest. That person was Noach. But unfortunately, in the interval of the ten generations that came into existence from Adam to Noach, the world had "gone down the tube." The Almighty did find Noach to be a Tzadik, and despite the fact that He decided to destroy the entire world, "Noach found favor in the Eyes of the L-rd" and Noach became the next person upon whom the Almighty wished to base the world. The Ribono shel Olam, as it were, started over with Noach – a new world.

Noach was to be the Tzadik Yesod Olam. Noach was saved. He saved the world. He repopulated the world. Those who came after him are not called "Children of Adam," they are called "Children of Noach". We are direct descendants of Noach because all other descendants of Adam were destroyed. Noach, after saving the world, emerged from the Taiva and "And Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself (vaYachel Noach) by planting a vineyard." [Bereshis 9:20]. Rashi quotes Chazal that the word vaYachel implies debasement. Rashi points out that out of all the things that someone could plant, Noach should not have planted a vineyard.

Noach did plant a vineyard, he drank the wine, he became drunk, and Noach also failed in his mission to be the Tzadik Yesod Olam. Once again, it was not destined that the whole world should come to perfection during the days of Noach.

The Ribono shel Olam waited another ten generations—the "Ten Generations from Noach until Avraham." Finally, the Almighty found in the patriarch Avraham the Tzadik Yesod Olam for whom He had been waiting for twenty generations! Avraham Avinu had Yitzchak. Yitzchak had Yaakov. And Yaakov had the Tribes of G-d (Shivtei K-ah). We, Klal Yisrael, are the descendants of Yaakov and we are supposed to carry on this mission of bringing the world to perfection.

That which Noach failed to do, Avraham Avinu accomplished. The question is – this Noach, with which we begin the parsha – "Noach, was a completely righteous man in his generation" (This is not a paid announcement in a newspaper where you find all kinds of titles used; this is the Ribono shel Olam talking! He does not use such terminologies carelessly) – does appear to have the makings of a Tzadik Yesod Olam. And yet he went from being "Tzadik Tamim" [completely righteous]

[Bereshis 6:9] to be coming an “Ish Adamah” [man of the earth] [Bereshis 9:20].

Chazal point out that Moshe began as a shepherd and he ended his life as an Ish haElokim [a man of G-d]. Noach, somehow, went in the other direction. How did this happen to Noach? How did this person who had such potential, and in whom the Almighty saw such potential – how did it happen to him that the first thing he did after leaving the Taiva was planting a vineyard and getting drunk?

There is a Sefer on Chumash called Chikrei Lev from a Rabbi Leibel Hyman Z”L (an old-time Baltimorean who was a Rosh Yeshiva in America, and who later moved to Eretz Yisrael where he was a Rav). He suggests a theory as to what happened to Noach:

During the whole period of the Flood, Noach had a horrible time. He was not enjoying life on a cruise ship. Besides the fact that the whole world was destroyed, and he was aware of that, Noach literally could not sleep. There are animals that eat during the day and there are nocturnal animals that eat during the night. Just feeding the animals – every single species that was in the world – by the time Noach came out of the Taiva, he was a broken man to say the least. He was, however, a man who felt that he accomplished his mission. He literally saved the world. From now on, everyone is going to be a Ben Noach – one of his descendants! What more can people accomplish in this world than what Noach accomplished? He saved the world and he saved it at great personal stress and pain. The experience was horrible!

When a person feels “I have done my job in this world” certain emotions go with that feeling: It is time for me to relax, to take off my shoes, put my feet up on the table, lean back, and enjoy myself. It is time for me to call it a career, call it a lifetime. The way Noach envisioned doing that was to plant a vineyard and drink the produce thereof and enjoy life. His attitude was: I have it coming! I earned it! I did what I was supposed to do! What else do You want from me?

Herein lies Noach’s tragic mistake. There is no such thing as “I did my job. Now I can go and retire.” One can retire when he is in the grave. Until that time, we have a mission to complete. No matter how great the accomplishment that we have had in this world thus far, this world is “today to do it; and tomorrow to receive reward.” [Eruvin 22a]

The Chikrei Lev makes a very interesting sociological observation. There is a common—almost universal—opinion in the world that after a person completes his job he retires. That, he says, is a concept for Children of Noach. It started with Noach. This was Noach’s gift to the world—the idea of retirement. Therefore, his descendants—Bnei

Noach—follow in his footsteps. If you are lucky, you can do it at 62, if you retire on full Social Security, you can do it at 66, if you become a millionaire you can do it at 54, and so forth. But at some point, you retire. And then what do you do? I don’t know. You can travel the country, you can read the paper, you can take up bridge.

That is not what the Ribono shel Olam expected from human beings. Retirement is something a Jew should never think about. That does not mean that a person can never stop working a job. But no one should have the attitude “I am finished. I can sit back and relax now.”

I recently met someone who had a heart attack at a young age. I had lunch with him, I was sitting and talking with him and I asked, “How is your health?” He told me, “Baruch Hashem, I can take care of myself now.” Then he told me, “My doctor is retiring.” This can be a traumatic event. Someone may have been with a doctor for thirty, forty, or fifty years. Now that he knows my conditions and my medical history so well, he is retiring. Who am I going to start with now?

His doctor—who was a religious Jew—retired on August 31st. My friend, who had been this doctor’s patient, davens in a Kollel in a certain city. On September 1, who should walk into the Kollel? It was his former doctor, with an Art Scroll Gemara Brochos under his arm. He is retired. A person does not need to practice medicine—or accounting or law or computers or whatever it is—for his entire life. People should live and be well! But a person must do something. A person needs to do something worthwhile and fulfilling.

That was Noach’s mistake. “I already did what I was supposed to do. What else do You want from me? Now I am going to sit back and enjoy myself.” That is a Bnei Noach attitude—not a Bnei Yisrael type of attitude.

Avraham Avinu came. He was the third Tzadik Yesod Olam. That which Adam could not accomplish and Noach could not accomplish, Avraham was able to accomplish. Not only did he accomplish, but he fixed this false ideology of Noach. How is that?

The Ramban says that the tenth of the Ten Tests with which Avraham Avinu was tested was the burial of Sara. After the Akeida [Binding of Yitzchak], Avraham Avinu needed to go and bargain on the price of a plot for Sara, even though the Ribono shel Olam had already promised him all of Eretz Yisrael. This is the tenth test. Everyone asks the question: Okay, it was a hassle. It was unpleasant. He might be distressed. However, if test number nine was Akeidas Yitzchak and Avraham passed the test successfully, is test number ten not somewhat anticlimactic? It does not seem to be on the same scale at all! Why is that the ultimate test?

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The answer is that this does not suggest that burying Sara was more difficult than the Akeida. The Akeida was the most difficult test—to be asked to slaughter one’s beloved son. Nothing surpasses the difficulty of that! But after the Akeida and eight prior tests, Avraham could well have thought “I reached the pinnacle.” I passed the ultimate test. He could have had the thought “I have been to the mountain! What more do You want from me? Enough already! What do You want from me, Master of the Universe?” No! That was not his attitude.

Avraham had no complaints. He had no questions. He went from the Akeida to dealing with the hassle of negotiation with Ephron and paying an exorbitant price for a burial plot for his wife, Sara. That is why it is the tenth test. It is the test of how a person deals with life after he figures and feels that he is entitled to the easy life now. He rejects the tendency to claim, “I did what I had to do, now give me a break!”

By passing the tenth test, Avraham Avinu corrected the sin of Noach, beginning the legacy of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – the legacy that no matter what we have done in our lives, it is not over until literally the Chevra Kadisha comes or until we are physically unable to continue.

Again, this is not suggesting that we need to die in our offices. No one in the history of mankind ever said on his death bed in regret, “I wish I spent more time in the office.” However, we must remain productive. When we reach the “Golden Years,” while we can perhaps “sit back” and take it easy from our work, we must remember that the Jewish approach remains, “It is today when it must be done; and tomorrow when the reward will be received.”

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What was the primary sin of the generation of the flood? In Parshat Noach we are told ‘Vatishachet HaAretz lifnei HaElokim’ – ‘the earth became corrupted before Hashem’. The Kotsker Rebbe brilliantly divides these words into two statements: ‘Vatishachet’ - the earth became ‘corrupted’, and why was that the case? ‘HaAretz lifnei HaElokim’ – the slogan of the people at that time was: ‘Earth before God’. That generation prioritised the physical and invested all their efforts into materialism, which for them was far more important than any form of spirituality or any acknowledgment of the role of God in their lives.

The antidote for this can be found in the gemara in Masechet Brachot. There, our sages bring to our attention two verses, both of which are very familiar to us and which seem to contradict each other. In Psalm 24 we read ‘Lahashem ha’aretz u’meloa – the earth and

everything in it, is the Lord's.' But then in Psalm 115 which we chant in Hallel, we say Hashamayim, shamayim laHashem vha'aretz natan lifnei adam' – 'the heavens are the heavens of the Lord and the earth he has given to people'. So this earth - is it God's or is it ours?

The gemara says both statements are correct. Hashem has given this earth to us so that through our actions, we will appreciate the presence of Hashem in it. The primary way we do this is through the brachot that we recite. When I take something which has grown out of the ground, before I eat it, I say a blessing over it and in that way, I transform a mere physical activity into an action that brings spiritual gratification. We find, for example, at the Shabbat table, we take an ordinary bottle of wine but by reciting Kiddush we sanctify it and all who hear the blessing. We place so much emphasis on what we eat over Shabbat and Yom Tov, not because there is something extra special in the food itself but rather through our eating our table becomes an altar. We elevate the physical and the material in order to appreciate the presence of Hashem in our lives on those special days.

Therefore, unlike that generation of the flood, our way of life is 'Elokim lifnei ha'aretz' – God comes before everything that is physical and material in this world and as a result, our lives are filled with so much happiness and meaning.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Echo Chambers of Babel

Jennifer (Rubin) Raskas

"And the whole earth was of one language and of common speech...and they said, 'Come let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven and let us make us a name'" (Genesis 11:1-4).

Leading up to the 2016 United States presidential election I asked my then 4-year-old son if he was interested in learning about who was running for president. "Running for president?" he asked, and then yelled out, "I bet they can't run as fast as this" as he ran at full speed across the room.

Homonyms, like "run", are just one example of how conveying meaning through speech can be confusing. This confusion is often magnified exponentially amidst people speaking different languages. One would think then, that in an ideal world, in which humanity has the best chance of cooperating and flourishing, people would all speak the same language. Yet, we see in the Migdal Bavel, Tower of Babel, narrative that unity and shared language led to such an egregious sin that God responded by mixing up humanity's languages. How could it be that speaking the same language would more likely lead to sin than speaking multiple languages?

One metaphorical interpretation of this narrative is that when we are surrounded by people who all speak the same language, who all have the same thoughts, ideas and interpretations of events, we are apt to start believing that our way of thinking, or even that we ourselves, are not only right, but godly. We are then in grave danger of believing we can build towers that reach heaven. What is the solution? As God decreed – we need different languages. We need to be amidst people who speak differently than us, who have a diversity of perspectives and visions that challenge our way of thinking and keep us humble.

A careful reading of the text reveals numerous ways the Dor Haflaga, the Tower of Babel generation believed they were godly. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks in Noach (5768) – A Story of Heaven and Earth, points out that God's first act of creation was to create a separate heaven and earth. By building a tower on earth that would connect to heaven, the Tower of Babel generation believed they could improve on God's creation by undoing this heaven and earth division. This fallacy of thought is perhaps best alluded to in the text when it states, "God came down to see the city and tower" (11:5). Humanity believed their tower could reach heaven, but God had to come down from heaven to see their earthly tower.

Rav Menachem Leibtag also uses textual analysis to show that the Tower of Babel generation believed they were godly. Rav Leibtag shows that throughout Tanakh man is charged with bringing God's name into the world. This starts at the end of the Adam and Chava narrative when the text states, "then he (Enosh) began to call out in the name of the Lord" (4:26), and continues with Avraham who twice built a mizbeach, altar, to call out the name of God. The Jewish people ultimately are charged with building the Mishkan, Tabernacle, where God's name will rest. In the Tower of Babel narrative, however, man builds a structure that will "let us make us a name". They replace their sanctified theocentric mission of promoting God's name with the anthropocentric promotion of their own.

On a psychological level this generation, living so soon after nearly the whole world was destroyed by a flood, may, out of fear, have instinctively wanted to build a structure as high as possible to evade any future treacherous waters. Here too, however, this generation would have believed they could outsmart God, and not have trusted God's covenantal promise to not destroy the earth again through flooding waters.

Today, like the Tower of Babel generation, we find ourselves in a sea of uncertainty as we navigate the tumultuous waters of a global pandemic coupled with intense political polarization. Amidst so much instability it is tempting to seek certainty or higher ground by

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aligning ourselves exclusively with people who think just like us. With advancements in social media, the vastness of the Internet and an ever-growing wide array of news sources, it is increasingly easy and comfortable for us to only surround ourselves with, and educate ourselves through, people who think and speak our same language. If we do not expose ourselves to diverse perspectives, to multiple languages, however, we too may be at risk of thinking that our ideas are impenetrable, and transcendent, and that they can reach to the heavens.

The Talmud in Bava Metzia 84a tells the story of Rav Yochanan who fell into deep grief after the death of his study partner. The Rabbis placed before him the very learned Rav Eliezer ben Pedath as a new study partner. Every time Rav Yochanan stated a dictum, Rav Eliezer would bring a baraita, ancient source, to support Rav Yochanan. Rav Yochanan cried out, asking Rav Eliezer why he was not like his old study partner who "used to raise twenty-four objections, to which I gave twenty-four answers, which consequently led to a fuller comprehension of the law."

Seeking diverse ideas may change or expand our way of thinking, and at the very least, it may sharpen it. It allows us to build ideas that can help humanity thrive, while keeping our ideas, and most importantly ourselves, grounded.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

On Drinking, Sleeping, and Making Proper Use of Our Divine Gifts

We are not sure what type of tree the etz hada'as was. The Tanaim had four different traditions on the matter: wheat (which at that time grew on a tree), esrog, fig, or grape. The practice of the Vilna Gaon was not to eat grapes on Rosh Hashana, following the opinion that: the etz hada'as was a grape vine, and that Adam Ha'ishon was created on Rosh Hashana (which that year was on a Friday; according to the calendar system we follow today, lo ad'u rosh, we see to it that Rosh Hashana never falls out on a Friday), and, according to the medrash, the same day he was commanded by Hakadosh Baruch Hu not to eat from the etz hada'as he violated that mitzvah. Therefore, because we don't want to repeat Adam's mistake, we avoid eating any grapes at all on Rosh Hashana, even though our grapes are clearly not from that etz hada'as.

The tradition that the etz hada'as was a grape vine additionally includes a comment that much tragedy, pain, and suffering have come about over the years because of the grape vine. People get drunk from wine, loose their senses, and act out in a most irresponsible fashion.

Some mekubalim suggest that perhaps the takonas chachomim to recite Kiddush on Friday night was instituted to serve as a tikkun for the sin of the etz hada'as. Since Adam

Ha'Rishon sinned on erev Shabbos using grapes, we use the grape vine on leil Shabbos to show how one can act in a most responsible and most proper way by b'dafka using that wine which often has led men to sin or otherwise act improperly.

The medrash points out that in the beginning of the parsha, Noach starts out as an "ish tzaddik tamim", but later on turns into an "ish ha'adama", and he defiled himself ("vayacheil Noach", he made himself chulin) by getting drunk, losing his senses, and acting in a highly improper fashion.

We congratulate those rabbonim who have not permitted use of liquor in their shuls. It has recently become a new "shtik" that yeshiva bochurim drink liquor at weddings or at a kiddush. This is a most improper practice, and the parents or rabbonim of these young men should see to it that they discontinue this "minhag shtus."

In the beginning of parshas Vayetze we read about Yaakov Avinu running away from Esav and dreaming of a ladder extending from Earth to the heavens, and angels ascending and descending the ladder. The midrash has several interpretations of this dream. One interpretation which appears in the gemara Chulin assumes that it is the same group of angels who ascended to heaven, saw the image of Yaakov Avinu engraved on the kisei hakavod, and later descended to see if in real life Yaakov Avinu actually lived up to the potential he had (according to the demus dyukno which they saw on the kisei hakavod.) When they came back down to Earth and found Yaakov fast asleep, bikshu l'horgo - they planned to put him to death. From the entire beriah, man is the only creature that was endowed with seichel, and therefore the angels were thought Yaakov was guilty of a serious sin - how can such a creature waste his time by sleeping? He ought to use all of his time to accomplish great things! The Torah continues to tell us, "v'hinei Hashem nitzav alav", that Hashem hovered over Yaakov to protect him from the angles. Hashem understood that while it is true that one who was endowed with tremendous potential ought not to waste his time by sleeping too much, every human being needs a certain amount of sleep to maintain his good health. Human beings have tremendous potential due to their unique tzelem Elokim and should not waste that potential of chochmo and seichel by drinking or by oversleeping. To preserve our tzelem Elokim we were commanded v'holachto b'drachav, to go in the ways of Hashem - ma hu, afa ata... Hashem is original, creative, artistic, etc., we all possess this tzelem Elokim and therefore ought to act in a creative, artistic fashion. Sitting around and aimlessly day-dreaming, i.e. being guilty of bitul zman, is considered a serious aveira, since it is an outright violation of the mitzvah of v'holachto b'drachav.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Koach of Noach

"These are the generations of Noach, Noach was a completely righteous man in his generation, Noach walked with Elochim." (Breishis 6:9) Noach lived in a stormy world, and that was even before the waters of the flood came along. The world around him was irredeemably saturated with corruption. HASHEM regretted having created mankind. Free will was a failed experiment and HASHEM was ready to abort the entire creation if not for one man and his family, Noach. For some reason he found grace in the eyes of HASHEM. The Holy Torah titles Noach with adjectives any one of us would be thrilled to approximate, "a completely righteous man".

The \$64,000 is how he was able to remain untouched and pure like rain in a world whose values were hostile to everything he lived for. It's a profoundly relevant question. Just how did he do it!?

It could be that the hint is right there at the very beginning of the verse, "These are the generations of Noach, Noach". The Mishne in Pirke Avos states a spiritual principle, "A Mitzvah generates another Mitzvah and Aveivas produce Aveiros." There is momentum to our behavior and choices and like with any muscle there is a strengthening that results from exercising a given limb.

"These are the generations of Noach, Noach..." Noach means calmness. Noach, the man specialized in the trait of "noach", calmness. He was not reactive to the world around. When one is reactive they are being controlled and shaped by their environment. They have forfeited their freedom largely to circumstance. When a person chooses to act rather than react then they are free to decide what is the right thing to do.

The more this power of "noach" is exercised the stronger it becomes. Noach was the master of this trait "noach", calmness, which afforded him to be the master of his destiny.

There is a dispute amongst behavioral psychologist. When the rat in the Skinnerian box performs the correct task the psychologist rewards him with a treat. In the exchange the psychologist is telling the rat, "Good rat! You're doing a great job!"

It can be seen through a different lens. When the rat gets the reward for his performance, the rat may be saying to the psychologist, "Good psychologist! You're providing me the treat right on schedule!" It's a subtle matter. Who is training who!? Is the psychologist training the rat or is the rat training the psychologist?

As we navigate the world, we live with an illusion that we are unaffected by the culture around us. Ironically, so many who seek to

Likutei Divrei Torah

express their individuality somehow manage to wear similar uniforms of nonconformity.

How does someone attain true independence?

Noach was not looking to directly influence the world around him. That feeds into another classic explanation of, "These are the generations of Noach, Noach..." and it also opens him up to criticism. Noach took care of Noach. The upside is that he remained uninfluenced by his generation. The downside is that he was unavailable to help people around him.

As an independent thinker, and as an historical actor (not a reactor), he was entirely available to, as the verse testifies, "...Noach walked with Elokim." That was the survival strategy, the legacy and also the Koach of Noach.



BS"D

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PARASHAT NOACH

Parashat Noach recounts the deluge and its aftermath. Recall that after the flood, Noach became intoxicated and exposed himself, at which point two of his three sons, Shem and Yefet, respectfully clothed their father to save him from further embarrassment. Rashi (9:23) writes that Shem "exhibited particular zeal for the mitzva," and therefore his descendants earned a special mitzva related to clothing - tzitzit.

The use of the word "mitzva" in this context suggests that the formal mitzva of "kibbud av v'em" - honoring one's parents - applied to Shem and Yefet, despite their not having been considered Jews. A similar implication arises from the story in Masekhet Kiddushin (31a) of the gentile Dama Ben Netina, who received immense reward for his diligent observance of this mitzva. Furthermore, the Rambam (Hilkhot Mamrim 5:11) writes that although a convert to Judaism loses all former familial relationships, he may nevertheless not smite, curse, or insult his parents. Such conduct would lead outsiders to scorn Judaism, observing that this individual previously afforded honor to his parents and suddenly, upon his acceptance of Judaism, does not. Clearly, this reasoning assumes that gentiles must honor their parents.

The obvious question, of course, is why this obligation did not make its way into the list of "mitzvot bnei Noach" ("Noachide Laws"), those mitzvot applicable to Jews and non-Jews alike.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe 2:130) answers that, in fact, gentiles are not obligated in the formal mitzva of honoring parents that applies to the Jewish people. They are, however, obligated in the fundamental precept of "hakarat hatov" - showing gratitude, a universal value. Needless to say, anyone with a sense of appreciation for kindness bestowed upon him would

display a considerable level of respect towards his parents, who gave him his life and went through the trouble of rearing him. Therefore, although the specific laws of "kibbud av v'em" do not apply to non-Jews, they must nevertheless honor their parents whereas they are included in the universal obligation of showing gratitude.

(Taken from Rav Binyamin Tabory's column, "Hamitzva Baparasha" in Shabbat B'Shabbato, Parashat Noach 5760.)

mj_ravtorah@shamash.org Shiur **HaRav Soloveichik** on Parshas Noach noach97 (Shiur date: 10/14/75)

Date: October 1997

The Torah tells us that Shem and Yefes took an article of clothing and placed it on their shoulders and covered their father. The Torah uses the singular, Vayikach, and he took, referring to Shem who took the initiative to act. Yefes merely followed Shem. The Midrash Rabbah (36:9) says that Rabbi Yochanan said that because Shem took the initiative in this Mitzvah and [this led] Yefes to join with him, Shem was rewarded with Talis [and Tcheles] while Yefes was rewarded with the Toga.

The Rav explained that Noach's sons each displayed a different attitude towards their elders. Cham was always looking for the shortcomings of his father, Ervas Aviv. Cham disdained his father for drinking wine. He did not allow his father the benefit of relaxing a bit after all he had been through in saving them and all that was in the ark with them. He never saw eye to eye with his father.

Yefes was not concerned with what was right or wrong. He was more interested in what the current convention was. His motivation to act was not borne out of an internal desire to perform acts of Chessed. Rather it was because at that moment it appeared to be the proper thing to do. [He might have acted differently if the situation arose at another time.]

Shem on the other hand an ingrained sense of Chesed and Ahava. Shem realized that everything he is and has, is because of his father. The Gemara uses Dama Ben Nesina as the example of extreme Kibbutz Av, when he refused to wake his father to get the key that was hidden under his father's pillow. Why did the Gemara have to harp on the aspect of the key that was under his father's pillow? Why didn't the Gemara simply say that the key was unavailable? Dama Ben Nesina rose up the ladder to become a member of the Roman Senate. Yet he realized that whatever he became was because of his father. The "key" to his own success was under his father's pillow, by respecting and honoring his father. True Kibbutz Av is when a son respects his father and always realizes that all he has is because of his father, now matter how great the son becomes.

Shem realized that he owed his existence to his father who brought him into the world. He realized that he now had an even greater debt towards his father, who saved him from the Mabul because he was a Tzaddik Tamim.

One must realize that he stands on the shoulders of his parents. The Ramban says that even though he argues with the Baal Halachos Gedolos, he does not claim to know more than the Behag. He compares himself to a midget who stands on the shoulders of a giant and who thus has a slightly better view than that which the giant himself enjoys. This is made possible because of the foundation that the giant has provided him. One must feel the same towards his father. This is also the concept of Talmid Chaver. The Talmid knows more because he has also benefited from the foundation his teacher [and all the previous generations of teachers] provided for him.

Shem was rewarded with the Talis and Tzitzit. The Midrash says that Tcheles is similar to the sea and to the heavens and to the Kisei Hakavod. Tcheles tells the Jew that he does not know it all and that he is dependent on Hashem. The sea and the sky represent that beyond the seemingly graspable surface there is an unfathomable and unreachable depth. Ultimately no matter how much man may believe he has accomplished and attained it is still insignificant relative to the true depth Hashem. Fear of father [Mora Av] is equated with fear of heaven [Mora Shamayim] because the Jew must

understand that just as he is dependent on Hashem, he must also recognize that he owes everything to his father as well.

Yefes was rewarded with the toga. Yefes was the father of Greece and Greek Culture [which was one that valued action based on the expedience of the moment] and its high regard for superficial beauty. It was willing to accept abominable actions in the name of culture. [The Rav compared this to modern times acceptance of illicit sexual activity and homosexuality and the scorn that modern youth have for the older generation].

Yefes was rewarded with the external trappings, Klapay Chutz. Shem was rewarded with the inner beauty as symbolized by the Talis and Tcheles.

[In another Shuir the Rav added another dimension to the difference between Shem and Yefes. Both Shem and Yefes had Kavod, respect, for their father. However only Shem displayed Yirah, fear, for his father.

The Rav explained these terms. Kavod is simple respect that one shows externally towards his father. This respect may come about only because the son would be ashamed of the scorn from others that he would receive if he did not care for his father. Yirah on the other hand means listening to the advice of his father, looking up to him, overlooking his mistakes and holding him in the highest esteem. As the Torah tells us "Sheal Avicha Vyagedcha, Zkaynecha Vyomru Lach", seek counsel from your father and consult with your grandparents.

Shem displayed Yirah for his father. He was able to overlook the acts of his father by viewing them in the context of what he went through and the enormous responsibility he had in preserving the world. He could not stand to see his father degraded. Yefes showed only Kavod for his father. He was afraid that others might accuse him of being a lesser son than Shem. So when Shem showed the initiative to act, Yefes was quick to participate in this good deed. Cham on the other hand showed scorn and disdain for his father and was always pointing out his father's shortcomings and those of the previous generations.]

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From: Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman <neshulman@aol.com>

Date: Oct. 21, 2020

[Seeing the Good]

Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman

We live in critical times, our cities and communities even countries are being threatened with this terrible virus. In some ways it reminds us of the story of the universal destruction of everything in the world which we read about in the portion of Noah.

Noah is the story of the universal destruction of everything in the world and all that was saved was one family and livestock. Apparently the destruction of all humanity was a serious possibility even at the beginning of mankind's story. In our time we are in the midst of a pandemic in such a way that we feel the threat keenly. The promise of the rainbow notwithstanding, the threat still hangs over some communities.

There was a time when I served in the Navy and was assigned to the editorial board of the Chaplain resource department. One of my tasks was to read manuscripts submitted for publication for in-service training of chaplains. I will not easily forget the title of one manuscript "this is a heck of a world in which we live". I will remember it not because it was good or bad but because of the pessimistic attitude. It expressed, that the world is basically evil and man is essentially corrupt. I will not forget it because of how diametrically opposed Judaism is to this view. Judaism stresses that the world is basically good and that man can overcome corruption and evil. And he is basically good. The story of Noah notwithstanding, man can conquer evil.

Last week we read Hashem's words to Cain, "sin crouches at the door but you must rule over it." Adversity can overcome you and even seem to conquer you. But you were given the choice and you can and must rule over adversity.

In a prominent medical school a professor greeted the freshman class with the following words , "before we begin our course I want to test your power of observation . I have hung a painting on the blackboard. Take five minutes, concentrate, and then tell me what you see". The painting consisted of a large white canvas and right in the middle was a black dot. Every student when asked what he or she saw replied "a black dot", not one of them commented on the white background. "There you are ladies and gentlemen , there is your power of observation . Beware of seeing only the black dot."

The results of this test did not indicate a weakness in the students vision. There was nothing wrong with their eyesight. It did indicate a willful closing of the eyes to the large white background. It has been said, " there is none so blind as he who would not see". Taken on the broader canvas of life itself, the truth of this observation becomes obvious. We are so willing to see the black dot - the evil - on the canvas of life , that we close our eyes to the white- the great mass of good and hope in the future.

On Rosh Hashanah we recited "Avinu malkeinu zochreinu bezikaron tov lefanecha , " remember us for good. , and in the same way God wants us to remember the good and not to stress the bad and the discordant. He wants us to see the white background and not to forget it.

There are many miracles associated with the exodus: the well of water that followed us wherever we went, the manna that came down from heaven every day. Yet for all generations we remember through the Sukkah one miracle above all, the clouds of God's glory . Why?

The Talmud suggests a partial answer. The clouds of God's glory disappeared with the death of Aaron. Therefore we make a Sukkah in order not to forget them. But I would like to suggest another answer. we complained about the manna, we complained about the well of water, we never complained about the clouds of God's glory , but instead showed only appreciation, gratitude for His shelter and God's providence. So the Torah wanted us to celebrate particularly that miracle about which all our memories are good. That is our ideal . Look for the white background. Our rabbis did not imply that we are to go through life wearing rose-colored glasses and seeing only the good. They considered that kind of vision just as faulty as seeing only the bad. What they stress is the universal tendency to magnify the black dot out of all proportion to the white. The ability to perceive good even when it is hard to find , is based on our faith in God and trust that He will lead us through the most trying and testing times .

Let us join in the prayer inspired by the words of Isaiah the prophet, "How good to hear on the hills the footsteps of the messenger , telling that peace will one day come , saying to Zion , 'thy King doth reign.'"

Date: 30 Oct 2003 From: "Rabbi Benjamin G. Kelsen, Esq." <bgkelsen@beisdin.org>

HaGaon HaRav Shlomo Elimelech Drillman, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonan

Editor's Note: The following is based upon HaRav Drillman's 5757 shiur on Parshas Noach which was delivered on 27 Tishrei 5757 (October 10, 1996).

"V'ach es dimchem..." According to the Kli Yakar this passuk is the source of the prohibition against suicide. Yet if this so then how is it possible that Chanania, Azaryah and Mishael would voluntarily step into the burning furnace? Because the word "ach" acts as an exclusionary clause which in certain cases, such as that of Kiddush Hashem, permits a person not to have to struggle against his persecutors. An example of this can be seen in the story of Avraham ben Avraham, the Ger Tzeddek, born Count Valentin Potocki and descended from a long line of noble Christian rulers, who sacrificed wealth and power in order to convert from Christianity to Judaism after taking an interest in Yehadus while studying at the University of Paris. His family had conducted a massive search for him and when he was found he was turned over to the inquisitorial board of the church. Though his family and former colleagues begged him to renounce Yehadus and save his life, he refused. He was sentenced to the auto-de-fé death by fire. As a result

of Christian "love," this Polish nobleman was forced to sacrifice his life in order to avoid converting back to Christianity. The Ger Tzedek chose to die as a martyr, with the Ribbono Shel Olam's name on his lips. In recognition of his great sacrifice he was buried in the Jewish cemetery of Vilna.

The preceding story was told by Reb Elchonan to those students who were hiding with him in 1941 at the home of Rab Chaim Ozer Grodzenski in Vilna as they were led to their deaths. When the Nazis finally found the Reb Elchonan after much searching, he put on his Shabbos bekeshe and streimel and calmly exited the house where he and the children with him were loaded into a cart or truck and driven into the forest and forced to disembark near a large empty pit. The Germans intentions became clear as a group of SS troops stood behind their prisoners and prepared their weapons. One of the boys, understandably frightened, began to cry.

"Do not be afraid, my son," said Reb Elchonan gently "we are about to take our place in the history of Klal Yisroel with Rabbi Akiva and the other harugei malchus and fulfill the mitzvah of dying "al kiddush Hashem". And when we reach the gates of Gan Eden the Avos themselves will hold open the gates for us and the Shvitei Koh will lead us to our seats in the Beis Medresh Shel Malch where we will take our place among the gedolim of past generations and hear words of Torah from Moshe Rabbeinu himself. So fear not, mein kinder, this is not the end. Rather, it is just the beginning."

When the Nazis began to fire Reb Elchonan grabbed one of the boys next to him and threw him into the pit and landed on top of him. Later, when the Nazis had left, this boy was able to climb, unhurt, from the carnage around him and escape. He later became one of the great talmidei chachomim of the post war era.

"RavFrand" Rabbi Frand on Parshas Noach 5758 1997

First A Mensch, Then a Tzadik Tamim This week's parsha begins with the words "These are the chronicles of Noach. Noach was a righteous faultless man (Ish Tzadik Tamim) in his generations" [Bereshis 6:9]. Rav Gifter once visited Ner Israel for Parshas Noach and made the following observation: We see from this pasuk [verse] that Noach possessed three qualities. He was a Tzadik (righteous person). He was a Tamim (a completely faultless person). And he was an Ish (a 'person'). However, notice that the sequence of the adjectives is Ish, Tzadik, Tamim. We thus see, said Rav Gifter, that before a person can be a Tzadik or a Tamim, he first has to be an Ish a Mensch (one who acts like a proper and dignified man). Rav Gifter told an interesting story. Rav Yisrael Salanter had a son in law who was about to take for himself, his own son in law. The future son in law was a tremendous scholar and Rav Yisrael's son in law was so impressed with him that he sent a notebook of the young man's Torah insights to Rav Yisrael Salanter, so that Rav Yisrael could see who his granddaughter was marrying. Rav Yisrael read the Torah insights and he sent back to his son in law, "Yes. You've showed me that this son in law that you are considering is in fact a Gaon, but the verse does not say 'I gave my daughter to this Gaon'; it does not say 'I gave my daughter to this illui'; it says 'I gave my daughter to this MAN' [Devorim 22:16]. It is nice to be a Gaon and a Talmud Chacham, but first you must impress me that he is a Mensch." (This future grandson in law whose chiddushei Torah impressed Rav Yisrael Salanter was none other than Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski).

The Flood Comes When the Illegitimate Becomes Legitimate There is a uniquely insightful Medrash relating to a verse in this week's Parsha. On the verse "...for all flesh has corrupted their way on the land" [Bereshis 6:12]" the Medrash [Vayikra Rabba 23:9] elaborates: "Everyone and everything became amoral. Even animals became so morally corrupt and decadent that one species mated with another species dogs with wolves, horses with donkeys, snakes with birds. The Generation of the Flood was finally wiped away when they started writing songs [according to one interpretation of the expression in the Medrash "...ad shekasvu Gumasiyos"] extolling cohabitation of males with males and males with animals." For years and

years immorality was rampant, but the final straw in G d's eyes was when songs praising homosexuality and bestiality made the "Top 40 Countdown." When the rock artists of Noach's time started writing songs about male with male and male with animal then the generation was eradicated. What does this mean? Until that point, although people were immoral, and animals were immoral, there was still at least a semblance of feeling that "what we are doing is illegitimate". "Sure, it's wrong, but we'll do it anyhow... behind closed doors. Sure, it's corrupt, but I don't go around bragging about it." Society legitimizes something when art imitates life. When art can extol the merit of immorality, then it goes from illegitimate to legitimate. That's when G d says, "Enough!". As long as there is a "Victorian Age" where everyone is immoral male with female and male with male but people know it is not right, that can still be temporarily "tolerated" by G d. But when it becomes an "alternative life style," a different form of normal life, when it becomes a subject for music and poetry, that's when G d can "take it" no longer. Another interpretation of the expression in the Medrash "...ad shekasvu Gumasiyos" is that they wrote marriage contracts between males. When they went down to City Hall and started taking out Marriage Licenses between two men, when they starting debating about making City Ordinances legalizing marriage between two males with all the rights of fully married couples, that's when Chaza"l say the fate of the Generation of the Flood was finally sealed. Up until that point, it was at least looked down upon; people knew that it was wrong. But when they went ahead and proclaimed that it was an acceptable alternative life style, then unfortunately the Flood came. Sources and Personalities Rav Mordechai Gifter Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland. Rav Yisroel Salanter (1809 1883), founder of the Mussar Movement. Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski (1863 1939) World renowned Torah scholar and community leader; Vilna. Rash'i Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040 1105); France. Foremost Bible and Talmud commentator. Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Balt, MD dhoffman@clark.net RavFrand, Copyright (c) 1997 by Rabbi Y. Frand and Project Genesis, Inc.

Parshas Noach 5763 2002

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

Young Israel of Midwood

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Noach first had children when he was 500 years old. That was pretty old even in those days. And Rashi feels the need to explain that: Said R' Yudin, why did all these generations give birth at the age of one hundred, while [Noach] did so at 500? Because hakadosh baruch hu said [if he will have many children] I will have to trouble him to build many arks. And so he withheld his wellsprings until he was 500 years old.

This raises an obvious question. What would have been so difficult about building several arks? Noach could have hired contractors, he had 120 years, contractors we know are slow but in 120 years a lot can be done, and he could have built as many arks as he wanted!

It seems that the ark had to be built by Noach himself; no one else could do it for him. Why?

The Torah says: va'yimach es kol hayekum; everything - buildings, bridges etc. – was eradicated. The water, the Gemara in Sanhedrin tells us, was boiling hot, so nothing could stand up to it. So how did the ark itself remain intact?

The Megaleh Amukos answers that Hashem's name was built into the dimensions of the ark. The letters of the shem havaya have the values 10, 5, 6 & 5. The letters of the shem adnus have the values 1, 4, 50 & 10. Taking the first letter of the shem havaya and multiplying it by the first letter of the shem adnus we get $1 \times 10 = 10$. Doing the same with second letters gives $4 \times 5 = 20$. Third letters give $50 \times 6 = 300$. And fourth letters give $5 \times 10 = 50$. So we have 10, 20, 300 & 50. 10 and 20 together are 30, the height of the Teivah. 300 is its length. And 50 is its width.

These are not just numbers. We could build a boat with the same dimensions and it wouldn't have any such power. Rather, the ark was the physical

embodiment of Noach's tremendous faith in Hashem. For 120 years he built it, despite the mockery of taunts of disbelief of all his friends and neighbors. Think of the courage that required; of the sacrifices that must have entailed. Remember that Noach had shown tremendous promise as a youth, which everyone had recognized: he had been named Noach when he invented agricultural tools, and everyone said: zeh yenachameinu, he's the hope of the future. He was looked up to and admired. And at the height of his powers he embarked on this seemingly wild, quixotic project to built a giant boat because the end of the world was coming. What strength of character that must have taken! What unshakable faith! What courage!

And so the very dimensions of the ark reflected Hashem's Name, they were the outer reflection of the faith and trust in Hashem, even at the cost of great self-sacrifice, that had gone into every plank and every nail of the ark. And it was that which made it impervious to destruction.

And that is why Noach had to build the ark himself. It couldn't be contracted out. Because no contractor could built into it that faith and courage which alone would give it the power to stand up to the raging, boiling waters of the flood to come.

Noach's ark, of course, is long gone. And Hashem has promised to bring another flood, at least not of water.

But there are other types of flood. There are others floods that threaten to engulf us. There is the flood of assimilation, which has swept away so much of our people. There is the flood of hedonism, the non-stop bacchanal which threatens our youth. And there is the flood of anti-Semitism, the feral hatred that boils around us, which the verse describes so strikingly with the words: and the wicked are like the churning sea, which is never still.

And so we need an ark of our own, to stand up to these floods.

And we have such an ark. It's no coincidence that in Hebrew the word for ark: teivah, means – not only an ark, but also – a word. Words are also teivos. Words of truth, of honesty, of faith, have tremendous power. And most powerful of all are words of Torah. Like Noach's teivah, every word of Torah is an embodiment of our faith in G-d, of our faith and trust in Him. And just as the dimensions of Noach's ark reflected the name of G-d, so too each word of Torah reflects His name; indeed, as the Ramban explains in his introduction to the Torah, each word of Torah is a name of G-d. And so, like Noach's ark, each word of Torah is a haven and a bulwark against the raging flood.

We saw before deep significance in the dimensions of the ark. There is another allusion in those dimensions, which is also pointed out by our seforim. The dimensions of the ark were 30x50x300. 30 is lamed, 50 is nun, and 300 is hin. Together they spell lashon, the tongue, whose task it is to produce teivos, words of Torah, each word a teivah, an ark, floating serenly above the boiling sea.

The floodwaters are rising. We have to be sure that the teivos are ready. With every word of Torah that we learn, with every shiur in which we participate, with every effort that we expend to support talmidei chachamim and yeshivos, we add to that fleet of teivos. And in those teivos, because of those teivos, We can hope to make it safely home to port, despite the floodwaters, as did Noach finally, when Yonah mazah bo manoach, he found rest at last, as shall we, bimheira b'yameinu amen.

from: Ohr Torah Stone <parsha@ots.org.il>

Oct 22, 2020, 7:20 AM

"Parsha and Purpose" – Noach 5781

Rabbi Kenneth Brander's weekly insights into the parsha

"How Will the World Remember COVID?"

How many lines will COVID-19 take up in human history?

Will it be a line or two? A paragraph? A chapter? Or a full book?

I think it depends on one crucial idea that we find in Parshat Noach.

In Chapter 9 of the Book of Bereshiet, we learn that in the aftermath of the flood, Noach planted a vineyard.

He drank the wine of these grapes, became drunk, and uncovered himself

inside his tent.

Noach's son, Cham, saw his father's nakedness and shared the news with his two brothers, Shem and Yefet.

Out of respect for their father, Shem and Yefet covered their father, walking backwards into his tent with the cloth draped from their backs so as not to shame him.

Then, in verse 24, we read that when Noach woke up from his wine-induced sleep, he learned what his youngest son had done to him.

This verse is SO critical.

You see, Noach is unhappy.

He is depressed because of the loneliness that he experiences all around him. The loss of family and friends, the loss of camaraderie and community, all casualties of the flood.

His depression causes his drunkenness, which is an attempt to escape his sorrow.

But at this point Noach realizes what his depression has caused.

He wakes up from his drunkenness, from his depression over the flood – "and learns what has happened".

Will we learn from COVID-19?

Will we learn how to have a true relationship with God?

One that is concerned not only with ritual but also with the larger messages of the Torah, such as the responsibility to make sure that our conduct allows for all of humankind to be safe and secure...

Religious experiences where ritual does not become an end in itself, but is a means to an end to ensure sacred moments in time with God.

Will we spend our time frivolously searching for religious reasons to explain why COVID-19 is happening,

Reasons that are predicated on our subjective suppositions on how society should be organized – using the pandemic to reinforce our pre-existing notions?

Or will we allow the pandemic to awaken us from our spiritually drunken stupor to recognize that we cannot take family and friends for granted?

To realize it is not about explaining why tragedy befalls society,

When such challenges arise, focusing on how we can engage to make a difference in the lives of the people around us?

How we recover from this pandemic will define how transformational this challenge has been.

Noach's righteousness is predicated not on the fact that he does not sin, but rather on his capacity to learn from his mistakes.

Similarly, the role that COVID-19 will play in human history depends on what we learn from it, and how those teachings inspire us to transform society and enhance our personal lives.

Shabbat Shalom

Dvar Torah: Noach, 5757 October 1996

Rabbi Moshe Shulman

NOACH: THE HUMAN BEING

"NOACH ISH TZADIK TAMIM HAYAH BE'DOROTAV" "Noach was a righteous and wholehearted person, IN HIS GENERATION."

Usually this phrase is understand as: "the most righteous in his generation". But our Rabbis were puzzled by the literal translation, which would seem to indicate a superfluous emphasis on Noach's righteousness in HIS generation only. Interestingly enough, two opposing explanations are given in the Talmud. (see Rashi ad hoc.)

The first interpretation is in Noach's favour. "He was righteous DESPITE his generation." Even though Noach saw only moral decay and wickedness all around him, he was able to overcome the peer pressure of society, and maintain his commitment to G-d, and to righteous values. How much more righteous would he have been were he to have lived in a generation with great leaders such as our forefather Abraham?

The second interpretation, however, is to to Noach's detriment. "He was Righteous in ONLY IN HIS generation," but compared to great personalities

of other generations, like Abraham, he would not have amounted to anything special. Only when compared to the wickedness of the generation of the flood, was Noach outstanding.

What a strange statement to make regarding one whom the Torah describes in only positive terms! Why would our Sages find it necessary to denigrate and belittle Noach's accomplishments in such a manner?

I would suggest that, quite the contrary, even this statement to Noach's detriment is really a compliment in disguise, and perhaps the more relevant role model of Noach for future generations. For diminishing Noach's own internal moral strength in facts boosts and augments his accomplishment! It emphasises his ability to withstand the pressures of the wicked society.

A great personality such as Abraham would have had no problem maintaining a righteous way of life even in the midst of an immoral society. But the lesson here is that one doesn't have to be an Abraham or an Isaac in order to maintain a commitment to one's spiritual values in a "spiritualless" society. Even a Noach, who, compared to Abraham, may not have been objectively an exemplary personality as such, was, never the less, able to overcome the temptations and pressures of a moral less society, and rise above them.

In many ways, our generation is not much different from that of Noach's! It is a secular society, full of violence, immorality, and values contrary to Judaism and its teachings. It is oftentimes quite difficult for us to remember our commitment to our Jewishness.

But we can learn from Noach, who was righteous in HIS generation, DESPITE his generation. Noach was able to stand against all the immorality and injustice of his world, stand alone, and shout: I live for values in which I believe.

Most importantly, we must remember that Noach was not a spiritual "superman". He was an ordinary man, with an ordinary life. He was "in his generation", a product of his generation, a product of his society. Yet, he was able to rise above them, and live by his commitment to G d and to spiritual values.

For many of us Noach is a more attainable role model than even Abraham. We shy away from the great Righteous giants of history, because they are too far removed from our lives. Noach is a symbol of our struggle, day by day, a struggle to maintain our commitment and values, in a world with different standards.

We must Learn from Noach, draw strength from his commitment. And in that way we shall all grow MEI'CHAYIL EL CHOYIL", "from strength to strength."

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~akiva/HOJMI/drosho.html>

<http://www.enayim.org/archives/noah5760.html>

PLEASANT COMMANDMENTS

Rabbi Mickey Siev

The concept of deracheha darchei noam (Mishlei 3:17), 'her (Torah's) ways are ways of pleasantness,' is one which finds expression within the halacha. The gemara in Succah (32a), for example, concludes that we are to understand the commandment to take kapos temarim on the holiday of Succos as referring to a lulav and not to a palm shoot because a palm shoot is thorny. Because of deracheha darchei noam, the Torah must have intended the more comfortable of the two possible options. The gemara uses this concept in other instances as well (see Yevamos 15a and 87b), and there are several occasions in which the commentators have similarly explained certain mitzvos as being tailored around the particular nature of human beings (a prominent example is the halacha of eishes yefas to'ar).

The idea that the Torah is concerned with the nature and comfort of human beings, and that this at times affects halacha, is very relevant to Parshas Noach. The Torah repeats (9:1 and 9:7) the mitzvah of p'rur'vu, the very first mitzvah in the Torah. The gemara (Yevamos 65b) explains that while men are obligated to perform this mitzvah, women are exempt. While the gemara quotes pesukim to show that this is the case, it is difficult to

understand the reason behind this difference. The Meshech Chochmah accounts for this difference through the concept of deracheha darchei noam. Women, unlike men, have a tremendous amount of physical pain and even danger during childbirth. Because the Torah is sensitive to this, it does not demand that women undergo this experience.

This explanation, Meshech Chochma points out, can be seen in the textual proofs that the gemara uses to show that p'rur'vu is only obligatory for men. The gemara suggests that when Hashem blesses Yaakov and tells him to have children, He uses the phrase p'rei ur'vei, in the singular, to hint that the commandment applies only to men and not to women. However, this just begs the question; when Hashem originally told Adam and Chava p'rur'vu, he used the plural! Shouldn't this indicate that the mitzvah in fact applies to both men and women? The Meshech Chochma's explanation as to why only men are obligated in this mitzvah solves the problem. When Hashem originally used the term p'rur'vu, He was in fact addressing both Adam and Chava. That was before they sinned. The sin is the whole reason that women have pain and danger during childbirth. Because at that time this element of childbirth did not exist, women were in fact obligated. Later, Hashem used the singular form, when addressing Yaakov, because the elements of pain and danger at that time did exist for women in childbirth, and Hashem therefore gave them a dispensation from the mitzvah. (The fact that our parsha uses the plural form, p'rur'vu, and it is of course after the sin of Adam and Chava, does not ruin this solution. Hashem is addressing Noach and his sons (see 9:1), and the plural form is therefore in order.)

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But I will establish My covenant with you. (6:18)

Rashi explains that the covenant/promise Hashem made with/to Noach was two-fold: the food supply in the Ark would not spoil; the reshaim, evil people of the generation, would do him no harm. He would safely live on the ark. The Brisker Rav, zl, makes an interesting observation. Noach was about to enclose himself on a traveling ark with representatives of every species of animal, wild beast and fowl. One would think that this would be considered a frightening experience. These were not domesticated pets. They were vicious wild animals. Noach did not seem to be afraid. Hashem had given him many assurances that the wicked people would not harm him and that there would be sufficient food in the storehouse for them. Scary. It is well-known that the lion attacked Noach because he was late with his dinner. Multiply that by thousands, and one can have an anxiety attack. It seems that Noach was not concerned.

The Rav explains that protection from clear and present danger was not necessary. Noach knew that Hashem would protect him. In order to ensure that the reshaim of that generation not attack the ark and kill him, however, Noach required a bris, covenant.

Horav Meshullam David Soloveitchik, Shlita, supplements his father's remarks. Noach's concern for the future was after the rain began, and the Flood was apparently imminent. When the reshaim clearly saw that their end was near, they were about to die, what was it that concerned them most? What were they involved in at this moment, when the shades of life were rapidly closing on them? To kill the tzaddik, Noach! Why? He was doing nothing to them. On the contrary; for one hundred and twenty years, he had done everything possible to convince them to alter their perverted way of life and repent. He warned them of the impending doom. They refused to listen. Now, they wanted to kill him, because he represented the truth – pure, unmitigated, unvarnished truth. This is a reality that the secular left cannot tolerate. Since they could not change the truth which was glaring them straight in the eyes, however, they wanted to kill the messenger. This has been the case throughout the millennia. Some things just do not change. They would rather quash the truth than concede that they were living a life of falsehood.

And he said, "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shem. (9:26)

Noach did not directly bless Shem; rather, he said that the G-d/Hashem of Shem be blessed and glorified. By saying this, Noach intimated the mission of Shem/ his descendants, of whom the standard bearer is Klal Yisrael. Their primary goal is to serve Hashem and glorify His Name in the world. Thus, when people bless Hashem, we, His children, are – by extension – blessed. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, points out that Hashem is the universal G-d. He is everyone's G-d. (Indeed, when the accursed Nazi held his gun to the head of the Telzer Rav and asked, "Jew, where is your G-d now?" the Rav replied, "He is your G-d too.") It is just that we are His most trusted servant and that He is especially manifest in our history. The mere fact that we continue to exist, despite the many calamities that we have endured, is testament to this verity. Furthermore, who else but Klal Yisrael has recognized, acknowledged and proclaimed Hashem's greatness?

Our mission in the world is to glorify Hashem's Name, so that the nations of the world will, upon seeing our behavior, bless the "G-d of Shem," the Ribono Shel Olam. When the Chafetz Chaim, zl, was niftar, passed away, one of the gentiles who lived in the vicinity of Radin (the Chafetz Chaim's home) came to be menachem avel, comfort the family. When he was asked concerning his relationship with the saintly deceased, who was one of the gedolei ha'dor, leaders of the generation, the man related that he was a shepherd by profession. He had occasion to pasture his herd in one of the grassy forests near Radin. Suddenly, he heard bitter weeping. He strained his ears and focused his eyes to identify from where the sounds were emanating. He searched until he came to a clearing and saw an elderly Jew standing beside a tree, weeping bitterly.

As he moved closer to hear what the man was saying, he was shocked to hear the man pleading with (he assumed) G-d that no mishap/stumbling block arise as a result of the books that he had authored. He later reported, "I stared at this man who stood before me. Here, before my eyes, stood an honest man, a man whose integrity was so pristine, his veracity so deeply committed to his G-d, that he found it necessary to shelter himself in the forest where no one would stop him. By us gentiles, such a person is unheard of. It is only by the Jews that such a person could exist and thrive.

"From that day on, I did everything within my power to get close to this holy man. I followed him and watched his mannerisms closely and saw that everything about him was ingrained in his psyche. This was not some elaborate show. He was not trying to garner attention for himself. He was the real thing."

Furthermore, the gentile related how impressed he was that the Chafetz Chaim did not recognize the appearance of the ozeres, woman who helped out in the house. Despite the fact that she had been working in his house for a number of years, the Chafetz Chaim never looked at her. This was unheard of in his world. Thus, he felt that he must come and share his emotions with the saintly man's family.

5758 1997

WEEKLY HALACHA FOR 5758 SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS NOACH By **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

"But flesh; with its soul its blood you shall not eat (9:4)"

BLOOD IN HALACHA

In several places the Torah warns against the ancient practice of eating the blood of animals, which was an integral part of demonolatry and other forms of idolatry(1). Today, when meat and poultry are already koshered before they arrive in our kitchens, most of us have virtually no contact with animal blood. There does exist, however, the possibility of transgressing the prohibition of eating blood even in this day and age. The following are cases in point:

BLOOD IN EGGS: A blood spot in an egg is not kosher and could

possibly render the entire egg not kosher. In fact, blood in an egg is not forbidden because of the prohibition against blood; rather, it is forbidden because it indicates the beginning of the formation of an embryo inside the egg(2). The majority of eggs, however, do not contain blood. Accordingly, one is not required to inspect an egg to see if there is blood in it, since we can assume that this egg is like the majority of eggs which are blood free(3). Since, however, it is an age old custom(4) practiced throughout the entire Diaspora(5) to inspect raw eggs before using them, we do inspect them(6). [It is permitted to eat hard boiled eggs which were not checked before cooking and cannot be checked once they are cooked, since in this case we rely on the fact that the majority of eggs are blood free(7).] B'dieved, if the eggs were not inspected, the food may be eaten(8). Nowadays, there is an additional factor to consider. In the United States, Israel and other countries, the vast majority of eggs are "battery eggs" from which chicks are not hatched. Thus any blood found in them does not prohibit their use. All that is required is to throw away the blood spot and the rest of the egg is permitted. Several contemporary poskim hold, therefore, that today we may be lenient with a blood spots in eggs and permit eating the egg, the food with which it was mixed, and the utensils in which it was cooked(9). Harav M. Feinstein takes a stricter approach(10). Although he, too, agrees that according to the basic halachah battery eggs are permitted, he still advises that it is proper to be stringent and throw away the entire egg, since there is a minority of eggs on the market which are not battery eggs(11). Harav Feinstein reasons that the centuries old custom of inspecting eggs and throwing out the bloody ones should not be abandoned(12), particularly since eggs are relatively cheap and people do not consider throwing away a bloody egg an unjustifiable sacrifice(13). Based on this view, the following rules apply: All eggs should be checked for a red or dark black spot. A brown spot is not a problem(14). If a spot is found, the egg should preferably be thrown out. If a lot of blood is found [especially if it is found in different parts of the egg], it is strongly recommended that the entire egg be thrown out, since this is a marked indication that this may not be a battery egg(15). If the egg was not checked and blood was found later when the egg was mixed together with other eggs or other food, the mixture does not have to be thrown out. The blood itself must be removed and discarded. Once the blood is mixed into the food and cannot be removed, the food is permissible to eat. The dishes do not become non kosher nor do they have to undergo a koshering process, although it is proper to wait twenty four hours before using them again(16).

HUMAN BLOOD: Although human blood is Biblically permitted(17), our Sages forbade it because it looks just like animal blood and it may seem to an onlooker that animal blood is being eaten(18). But the Rabbis only forbade human blood which is detached completely from the body, not blood which is still "within" the body. Therefore: If one is eating a slice of bread and blood from his gums stains it, the blood along with a sliver of bread(19) should be removed from the bread(20). The bread may then be eaten. If the same happens when one is eating fruit, the fruit must be washed off well and then it may be eaten. Bleeding gums may be sucked and the blood swallowed, since this blood is considered as if it has not become detached from the body(21). A bleeding finger may be sucked with one's mouth but it is questionable if the blood may be swallowed(22). Once the bleeding ceases, it is prohibited to stick the blood stained finger in one's mouth, since it appears as if one is sucking the blood(23). Human blood which inadvertently got mixed with food (such as blood from a cut that dripped into food) may be consumed as long as no bloody redness is visible. This is true even if there is more blood than food in the mixture. If redness is visible, then the food may not be eaten, even if the volume of the food is sixty times greater than that of the blood(24). If blood gets mixed into food, additional food may be added into the mixture in order to make the blood invisible(25).

BLOOD ON SHABBOS On Shabbos or Yom Tov, it is forbidden to suck or squeeze out blood from a wound(26). On Shabbos or Yom Tov, it is forbidden to suck blood from one's gums(27). It is permitted to peel off a scab on Shabbos(28) if it will not result in blood oozing from the wound(29). To stop a minor bleed [e.g., a nose bleed], it is preferable to use a paper

napkin or tissue(30). If none is available, a cloth [preferably white or a light colored] may be used31. To stop a major bleed, use whatever is at hand.

FOOTNOTES: 1 Explanation of Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 3:46. See also Ramban, Kedoshim 19:26. 2 Talmud, Chullin 64b. 3 Rama Y.D. 66:8. 4 Ibid. 5 Aruch ha Shulchan 66:32; Kaf ha Chayim 66:41. 6 Igros Moshe. It is clearly forbidden to close one's eyes so as not to see if there is any blood in the egg. Ma'adanie ha Shulchan 66:68. 7 Y.D. 66:8. 8 Aruch ha Shulchan 66:32, who adds that if the blood is visible [as it is sometimes when egg yolk is smeared over challah] it should be removed. 9 Minchas Yitzchak 1:106; Yechaveh Da'as 3:57. 10 See also Responsa Kinyan Torah 2:7 who takes a more stringent approach, but for different reasons which do not apply on today farms. 11 Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:36. 12 Harav Feinstein points out that even "normal" eggs do not have to be checked according to the basic halachah, yet the long standing custom contradicts that. We, too, should honor the custom. 13 It seems clear, though, that in a place where eggs are expensive, one may rely on the basic halachah and permit the egg, see Yechaveh Da'as, ibid. who makes this point. 14 Darkei Teshuvah 66:23 quoting several poskim. 15 Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:36. 16 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:61. This stringency applies only if the bloody eggs were cooked or fried in a pot or pan; not if they merely came into cold contact. 17 Talmud, Kerisus 20b. 18 Rashi, Kesuvos 60a. 19 Based on Yad Yehudah Y.D. 96:5. 20 Y.D. 66:10. 21 Y.D. 66:10. 22 See Darkei Teshuvah 66:68 who quotes a dispute among the poskim as to whether this blood may be swallowed or not. Darkei Teshuvah does not decide the issue. 23 Kaf ha Chayim 66:48 quoting Ben Ish Chai. 24 Yad Avraham, Y.D. 66:10; Darkei Teshuvah 66:71. 25 Darkei Teshuvah 66:72. 26 O.C. 328:48. 27 Mishnah Berurah 328:147. See Magen Avraham 53 that this may be Biblically prohibited. 28 O.C. 328:22. 29 Sha'ar ha Tziyun 328:67. 30 See Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchah 14:19. 31 Mishnah Berurah 328:146.

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LOCKDOWN FEVER

In the good old days when a person was isolated and alone for a period of time in one's own home, the common expression was that one was suffering from cabin fever. Due to the coronavirus pandemic's effect upon society, many countries including Israel have enforced stay-at-home lockdowns in an attempt to combat the contagious nature of the disease.

There is great debate raging in all the countries and especially here in Israel as to whether or not the lockdown is truly necessary, and if it is effective in slowing the spread of the disease. Unfortunately, the lockdown has become a political instead of a purely medical discussion.

There is no question that the lockdown has had an enormous effect upon our society and community, economically, socially, psychologically, and spiritually. We are forced to wonder as to whether we have somehow made the cure as bad or perhaps even worse than the effects of the problem itself. Since I am not a medical expert, I cannot really opine on this issue with any great degree of certainty or wisdom. Nevertheless, I think I am clearly aware of consequences that will be long-lasting after this lockdown is over and even after the pandemic is under control by vaccines, therapeutics or simply by the fact that in the past pandemics eventually run their course and end.

Whichever way we view this matter, there is no question that the lockdowns have had a devastating effect on our communities in general and on many individuals. And there are effects and consequences that will only become apparent months and years from now.

Jewish history and halachic norms based on tradition in these matters is

greater even than the gift of prophecy. Invested in Torah, leadership throughout the generations many times established rules, customs, and instructions for social and private behavior that, so to speak, expanded the biblical rules of the Torah itself. These rabbinic decrees and customs many times were established not only to meet immediate and current situations but were farseeing enough to deal even with later consequences that at the moment of the decree may not have been visible or understood by the masses of Israel.

There is no question that all wise decisions must contain an element of prophecy within them. The rabbis have taught us that the wise person is someone who can anticipate the future and take steps to deal with it presently. The rabbis have also taught us that wisdom in these matters is even greater than the gift of prophecy.

I have thought long and hard about decisions and actions taken and made during these lockdown periods. I do not debate the medical wisdom involved in so doing nor do I intend to criticize or even strongly disagree with many of the rabbinic opinions advanced throughout this last period of the coronavirus. However, I do feel that many of the leniency's regarding prayer – including places of prayer and outside ad hoc prayer services – have long-term consequences, some of which may certainly not prove to be beneficial and positive.

The problem always is that Humpty Dumpty cannot be put back together again easily. Once you have told people that hearing 30 blasts of the shofar is sufficient, that many parts of the prayer service can be omitted, that attendance for prayer in an actual synagogue can be dispensed with because it is more convenient to pray at home, and that these originally ad hoc prayer meetings are allowed somehow to become permanent synagogue breakaways, then next Rosh Hashana – we should all live and be well to observe it in health and good spirits – there will be those who will somehow yearn for the good old days when we only had to be at a two -hour prayer service, with 30 blast of the shofar, no sermons and perhaps even the leisurely ability of private prayer in one's own home.

I know full well that there are people who will have difficulty physically in attending services in the synagogue building itself. But these people and people like them had such difficulties before the coronavirus struck. Everyone must do the best that they can and watch out for themselves in manners that they find healthy and convenient. However, it cannot be that the cure of the lockdown should somehow become the norm and acceptable to our community and to the Jewish world generally.

Our synagogue has remained open constantly and when we could not pray indoors because of governmental rules we prayed outside - but outside of the synagogue building and nowhere else. The preservation of our community is dependent upon the preservation of the primacy of our synagogue and only a mindset that understands this and agrees to it will allow us to escape from the ravages of lockdown fever.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

AVRAHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

by Yitzchak Etshalom

I INTRODUCTION

As we mentioned in the preface to last week's essay, the series of analyses on Sefer B'resheet will focus on fundamental issues of our relationship with the text of T'nakh. In future issues we will explore the relationship of traditional biblical scholarship with archeology, geography and other disciplines. In this issue, we will visit an older problem, one which addresses the entire enterprise of tradition and its reliability.

That genre of Rabbinic literature commonly known as "Midrash" has been widely misunderstood - and has taken a proverbial "beating" in more than one circle of late. In order to properly assay the issue and begin our inquiry, we must first clarify and distinguish between two terms which are often confused in discussions of Rabbinic homiletics.

The term "Midrash", which means exegesis, a particular type of textual expansion and application, is properly used to describe any of a number of exegetical methods. Generally speaking, there are two types of Midrash - Midrash Halakhah and Midrash Aggadah.

Midrash Halakhah is an exegetical analysis of a Halakhic text with a normative result.. For instance, when the Midrash Halakhah infers from the word *בָּהָמָה* (of the animals) at the opening of the laws of offerings (Vayyikra 1:2) that not all animals are fit to be brought to the altar (and then goes on to list which are excluded), that is Midrash Halakhah. Since the results of a Halakhic discussion are practical, the exegetical method is (relatively) tightly defined and is subject to challenge and dispute.

Midrash Aggadah can be loosely defined as any other sort of exegesis on T'nakh text. This includes exhortative, poetic, prophetic, narrative, epic and any other non-normative text in T'nakh. As expected, the range of texts available for Midrash Aggadah is much broader and the methodology is less strictly defined than Midrash Halakhah. In addition, multiple approaches can be tolerated and even welcomed since there is generally no Halakhic implication to the inference. Even in those cases where such an inference may be claimed, the general methodology of the study of Midrash Aggadah allows (indeed, encourages) a wider range of approaches and perspectives. As such, we may find a series of alternate Midr'shei Aggadah on a given passage (e.g. the "test" of Avraham in B'resheet 22:1) which, although representing different perspectives, do not necessarily preclude one another.

Hence, the term "Halakhah" when standing alone (and describing a type of Rabbinic statement) would most properly be associated with a normative statement independent of the text. The word "Aggadah" refers to a statement which is non-normative and, again, is not derived from or associated with a given text.

The study of Midrash Aggadah has always been challenging - to identify which interpretations are interpretive and an attempt to discern the straightforward meaning of the text, which are polemic (typically against the early Christians), which are veiled attacks (e.g. on the Roman Empire), which are traditional lore that the homileticist is "hanging" on a particular text etc. Much of the derision shown by many towards statements in the Midrash Aggadah (indicated by phrases such as "it's **only** a Midrash") is rooted in an inability (or unwillingness) to rigorously address the text and analyze its various components; understanding that some are intended as literal interpretations and an actual retelling of history while others are poetic and artistic devices intended to drive home a critical point. R. Avraham ben haRambam neatly divided the students of Aggadah into three groups - those who take everything literally, who are fools, those who take nothing literally, who are heretics - and those who wisely analyze each passage and discern how each passage ought to be studied. A proper and incisive approach to the study of Midrash Aggadah - knowing which passage to approach with which perspective - consistently rewards the student with a discovery of depths of wisdom and profound sensitivity.

A proper presentation of the various facets of Midrash Aggadah is well beyond the scope of this forum; however, that does not exempt us from, at the very least, reexamining our attitude towards this central branch of Rabbinic literature and strengthening our awareness of the sagacity and trust of Haza"l which is, after all, one of the forty-eight methods through which Torah is acquired.

To that end, we will assay a famous Midrash Aggadah (which is, *prima facie*, nearly bereft of Midrashic method) whose point of origin is an oblique reference at the end of our Parashah. The central thesis here is that there is, of course, much more to the Midrash Aggadah than meets the eye - the fuller thesis will be presented after the text, below.

II THE MIDRASH

A: PREFACE

One of the central figures - if not the pivotal one - in Sefer B'resheet is Avram/Avraham. We are given rich descriptions of his interactions with kings, family members, angels and G-d Himself - but all of that begins with his selection at age 75. We are told nothing, in the text, about his early life. The few sketchy verses at the end of our Parashah help little (if at all) in explaining why this son of Terach, scion of Shem, was selected as the progenitor of G-d's people.

There are several well-known Aggadot which partially fill in the "missing years" of Avraham's youth. Perhaps the most well-known Aggadah appears in several versions and has, as its point of departure, a minor difficulty in the Torah's retelling of Avraham's family life:

And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Avram and Nachor took wives; the name of Avram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nachor's wife, Milkah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milkah, and the father of Yiskah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of K'na'an; and they came to Charan, and lived there. And the days of Terach were two hundred and five years; and Terach died in Charan. (11:26-32)

The death of Haran (not to be confused with the place Charan, located in northern Syria or southern Turkey) during the life (literally "in the face of") his father was a first. Although Hevel died before Adam, we're not given any information about the relationship between the bereaved father and his murdered child. Here, the text clearly marks the death of Haran as happening before the death of Terach - the first recorded case of a child predeceasing his father where we can actually place the two of them in any sort of relationship.

The question raised by anyone sensitive enough to note the irregularity here is why, of all people, the future father of our people would claim as father and brother the first instance of such tragedy. The Midrash addresses this problem - the premature death of Haran - and, along the way, does much to inform us of Avraham's life before the command of "Lekh Lkha" (12:1).

B: THE TEXT OF THE MIDRASH (B'resheet Rabbah 38:16)

And Haran died in front of Terach his father.

R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafo [said]:

Terach was an idolater.

One day he went out somewhere,

and put Avraham in charge of selling [the idols].

When a man would come who wanted to purchase, he would say to him:

"How old are you?"

[The customer] would answer: "Fifty or sixty years old".

[Avraham] would say: "Woe to the man who is sixty years old

And desires to worship something one day old."

[The customer] would be ashamed and leave.

One day a woman came, carrying in her hand a basket of fine flour.

She said: "Here, offer it before them."

Abraham siezed a stick,

And smashed all the idols,

And placed the stick in the hand of the biggest of them.

When his father came, he said to him:

"Who did this to them?"

[Avraham] said: "Would I hide anything from my father? a woman came, carrying in her hand a basket of fine flour.

She said: "Here, offer it before them."

When I offered it, one god said: "I will eat first,"

And another said, "No, I will eat first."

Then the biggest of them rose up and smashed all the others.

[His father] said: "Are you making fun of me? Do they know anything?"

[Avraham] answered: Shall your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?

He took [Avraham] and handed him over to Nimrod.

[Nimrod] said to him: "Let us worship the fire".

[Avraham] said to him: "If so, let us worship the water which extinguishes the fire."

[Nimrod] said to him: "Let us worship the water".

[Avraham] said to him: "If so, let us worship the clouds which bear the water."

[Nimrod] said to him: "Let us worship the clouds".

[Avraham] said to him: "If so, let us worship the wind which scatters the clouds."

[Nimrod] said to him: "Let us worship the wind".

[Avraham] said to him: "If so, let us worship man who withstands the wind."

[Nimrod] said to him: "You are speaking nonsense; I only bow to the fire.

"I will throw you into it.

"Let the G-d to Whom you bow come and save you from it."

Haran was there.

He said [to himself] Either way;

If Avraham is successful, I will say that I am with Avraham;

If Nimrod is successful, I will say that I am with Nimrod.

Once Avraham went into the furnace and was saved,

They asked [Haran]: "With which one are you [allied]?"

He said to them: "I am with Avraham."

They took him and threw him into the fire and his bowels were burned out.

He came out and died in front of Terach his father.

This is the meaning of the verse: And Haran died in front of Terach.

C: THE OVERALL QUESTION

Reading this Aggadah, one is immediately struck by the non-Midrashic style. There is absolutely no association with text here. Instead, there is a detailed story, down to the specifics of the debate between Avraham and Nimrod, the manner in which Avraham would shame his customers and the story he concocted to explain the decimation of the "inventory" to his father. The question one must pose here is one of source - from where did the rabbis derive this information? How do they know that Terach was an idol-salesman; that Avraham spoke this way to his customers, the other way to his father, in such a manner to Nimrod - and why would we even think that Avraham and Nimrod ever met?

The one answer which is always available and seems an "easy way out" is "Mesorah". To with, the rabbis had a reliable tradition going back to Avraham himself that this is how this particular series of events played out. That is appealing - although anyone embracing this approach would have to contend with variations in alternate versions - yet there are two serious problems with this response. First of all, if this was a reliable tradition dating back to Avraham, why isn't that mentioned in the text of the Aggadah? After all,

when the Rabbis have reliable traditions dating back to a much more recent time, they indicate this (see, *inter alia*, M. Peah 2:6) or, at the very least, refer to the statement as “Gemara” or *הלכה למשה לסיini* or, in Aggadic contexts - *דבר זה מסורת בידינו* - (BT Yoma 21a). Second of all, why is the entire Aggadah credited to one authority (R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafo)? Shouldn’t it be presented as an anonymous text?

There is another direction - perhaps as much to the “skeptical” side as the first answer was to the “believer” side - that has its roots in some rabbinic scholarship, although certainly not the mainstream. Some will suggest that this Aggadah reflects a polemic against idolatry, is a product of its time in the sense that it stakes no claim to knowing anything about Avraham’s actual activities, but uses Avraham as a convenient foil for “making a point” about principles, idols, loyalty etc. As stated, this is not as foreign an idea as one might think and is sometimes the most appropriate way to view an Aggadah - but is often another “easy way out” of contending with the difficult question of “how did they know this”?

I would like to suggest an alternative approach to understanding this Midrash, one which maintains the integrity of the report and its association to the historic character of Avraham, while defending against the two challenges raised above to the “Mesorah” argument noted above.

D: THE THESIS

Although direct derivations are not found in this Aggadah (albeit the opening and closing lines anchor the Aggadah in a Midrashic attempt to identify the reason for Haran’s early demise), I’d like to suggest that the entire reconstruction of Avraham’s life here is the result of Parshanut - textual interpretation. In other words, every one of the major components of this selection is the result of a reasonable read of T’nahk.

In order to accomplish this, each text in the Avraham narrative (and other selections which shed light on this period) must be read carefully, keeping an eye out for parallel texts and allusions to related passages.

III RECONSTRUCTING THE MIDRASH

There are six principle components to the Aggadah; we will demonstrate that each of them can be supported by a sensitive and careful read of the Avrahamic narrative and related texts:

- A: *Terach the idolater*
- B: *Terach the salesman*
- C: *Avraham’s style of argumentation*
- D: *Avraham’s meeting with Nimrod*
- E: *Avraham in the fire*
- F: *Haran and “Pascal’s Wager”*

A: Terach the Idolater

The source for this one is an explicit text (Yehoshua 24:2). At the end of his life, Yehoshua related a historiosophy to the people, which began with a line familiar to us from the Haggadah:

And Yehoshua said to all the people, Thus said Hashem, G-d of Yisra’el, Your fathers lived on the other side of the river in old time, Terach, the father of Avraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods.

Even though this translation renders the last pronoun unclear, such that we do not know who worshipped foreign gods (it may have been Nachor and Avraham, which would give us a whole different history...), the Ta’amei haMikra (trope marks) make it clear that those who worshipped foreign gods are “your fathers”; Terach is the representative of that group mentioned by name.

When the Aggadah begins by stating “Terach was an idolater”, it isn’t innovating a new idea or revising history - this is the infor-

mation found in Yehoshua's farewell address.

B: Terach the Salesman

This one is not as straightforward and accessible as Terach's idolatrous affiliation. A few pieces of information about the ancient world which can be inferred from the text will help us.

First of all, society in the ancient world was not transient. People stayed in one area for generations except for cases of war or famine (which is why the call to Avraham of "Lekh L'kha" is so extravagant and reckoned as the first of his tests.) Only people whose livelihood allowed them to move easily did so - and, as the text tells us, Terach took his family from Ur towards K'na'an, getting only as far as Charan. Terach was the first person to uproot from one location to another without direct Divine intervention (such as Adam, Kayyin and the people in Shin'ar who were exiled). Hence, he must have had a profession which allowed him to easily move - which leaves him either as a shepherd, an artisan or a salesman. As we demonstrated in an earlier shiur (V'shinantam 3/6), Avraham and Ya'akov were traders whose chief livelihood and fortune were made in that fashion.

In addition, we have other records of idolaters who were, in addition to devotees of the pagan religion, men who engaged in the sale of ritual objects. In Shoftim 17-18, we are told the story of Mikhah who lived on Har Ephraim. He took money given to him by his mother and had an idol fashioned which he then set up in a temple. When his idol, its appurtenances and his priest were seized (by members of Dan - a story we will revisit next week), the townspeople chased after the thieves to try to restore their goods. Although not stated explicitly, it seems that the reason for their distress at the loss of the idol and its "support system" was an issue of livelihood. Evidently, the temple was a source of revenue for the town; whether as a result of travelers staying there or because they sold Traphim (household gods); in any case, the association between idolatry and trade seems clear.

C: Avraham's style of argumentation

At three points in the Aggadah, Avraham engages in some form of theological debate (or rebuke) - with the usual customer, with his father and with Nimrod. His style of arguing is consistent - at no point does he come out and state his beliefs, strong though they may be. Instead, he elicits information from his disputant, and then, in classical Socratic fashion, turns his own words against him, using his disputant's premise to bolster his own argument.

For instance, he doesn't ridicule or rebuke the customer for purchasing a "god fresh from the kiln"; rather he asks him (seemingly off-handedly) as to his age. One almost gets the sense that Avraham's response is muttered under his breath - "how ridiculous, a man of fifty worshipping a day-old idol" - and then, in shame, the customer slinks out of the shop.

That we have every reason to believe that Avraham would have worked to promote the belief in one G-d is evident from the verses which highlight his selection (12:1-3) and his activities in K'na'an (calling out in the name of G-d). We don't need to look far to find sources that support the content of his interactions - but how do the authors of this Midrash Aggadah know his somewhat unconventional form of argumentation?

The answer can be found, I believe, in the interaction between Avraham and Avimelekh (Chapter 20). Unlike the first "wife-sister" episode (in Egypt), which was necessitated by the famine, there is no reason given for Avraham's descent to G'rар (20:1). Avraham knew, in advance, that he would have to utilize the "wife/sister" ruse in order to spare his life (v. 11) - but why go there at all?

Note that in that interaction, Avraham does not rebuke the king (and, indirectly, his constituents) for their moral turpitude until they come to him, ready to hear an explanation for his curious behavior. If he went to G'rар in order to spread the word and attract more adherents (see Rashi at 12:5 and S'foro at 12:9), why didn't he immediately come in and decry their low standards? Alternatively, if he knew that Sarah would be endangered as a result, why go there at all?

It seems that Avraham went there in order to engage in debate, a debate which could only begin once the people challenged him

and were receptive (as a result of their great fear) to what he had to say. It seems to have succeeded, at least partially, because Avimelekh (or his son) recognized G-d's support for Yitzchak (26:28), implying that they had some understanding of - and respect for - the G-d of Avraham.

Utilizing the one instance we have of argumentation and chastisement in which Avraham participated which is explicit in the text, the Ba'alei haMidrash are able to apply that style to earlier interactions in Avraham's life.

(The claim here is not that each of the specific events - or the details, such as the age of the customers - can be inferred from the text, nor that we need accept each of them as an exact historic record; the thesis is merely that the general information and messages of the Aggadah are the result of a careful reading of text).

D: Avraham's meeting with Nimrod

The Torah is not only silent about any meeting between these two, the entire Nimrod biography (10:8-12) is completed well before Avraham is even introduced in the text. From where did the Ba'alei haMidrash get the notion that Nimrod and Avraham had any direct interaction?

One feature shared by these two men is power - both were recognized as kings. Indeed, Nimrod was the first person to be considered a king:

And Kush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty one. He was a mighty hunter before Hashem; therefore it is said, As Nimrod the mighty hunter before Hashem. And the beginning of his kingdom was Bavel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Avraham is also considered royalty:

And the Hittites answered Avraham, saying to him, Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us... (23:5-6)

There is one more component to the Nimrod story which is vital for understanding the Aggadah. The attitude of the T'nakh is generally negative towards human rulers - note Gid'on's response to the people of Menasheh in Shoftim 8, and Sh'mu'el's diatribe against the people's demand for a king in I Sh'mu'el 8. Nimrod being the first self-declared king, he was also the first to form a direct challenge to the Rule of the one true King, haKadosh Barukh Hu. Avraham's entire life was dedicated to teaching the world about the one true G-d and to encouraging everyone to accept His rule. As such, Avraham and Nimrod are natural combatants and antagonists. Since Nimrod's life overlapped that of Avraham, and he ruled in the district where Avraham operated (at least during part of his younger years), the land of the Chaldeans, it is most reasonable that the two of them would have interacted. Once we add in the salvation from fire (see next section), following the model of the latter-day king of the same area (Nevukhadnezzar) throwing loyal monotheists into the fire, their meeting is almost a foregone conclusion.

E: Avraham in the fire

When G-d addresses Avraham in anticipation of the first covenant (chapter 15), He states:

I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim (15:7).

Before assessing the allusion to a later verse, we need to clarify the meaning of "Ur Kasdim". The word "Ur" may be a place-name (hence "Ur of the Chaldeans" in most translations); alternatively, it may mean "the UR which is in Kasdim" - the word UR meaning furnace (cf. Yeshaya 31:9, 50:11). Even if it is a place name, it may have been named after a great furnace found there.

In any case, G-d took Avraham out of this place - how do we understand the verb *הצאתיך*? (*I took you out*)? Does it refer to the command to *Get thee from thy land...*? Does it allude, perhaps, to a more direct and interventionist evacuation?

The only other place in the Torah where the phrase *הצאתיך* appears is in the first statement of the Decalogue:

I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt... (Sh'mot 20:2, D'varim 5:6)

In that case, the “taking out” was accomplished through miraculous, interventionist means.

If we accept the theory (which we have explained and used countless times in this forum) that unspecified terms in T’nakh are best clarified through parallel passages in T’nakh where those same terms are used, then we have a clearer picture of the “exodus” of Avraham from Kasdim. G-d intervened, miraculously, to save him, in some manner which would later be approximated in Egypt.

While we have much information about the miracles leading up to the Exodus, there is little in T’nakh to describe the servitude from which we were redeemed. There is, however, one description of the Egyptian sojourn which appears in three places in T’nakh. In D’varim 4:20, I Melakhim 8:51 and Yirmiyah 11:4, the Egypt from which we were redeemed is called an iron furnace (כור ברזל). So...if G-d presents Himself, as it were, to Avraham, with the words “that took you out” and we have no information as to what it was from which Avraham was saved, we can look at the parallel passage and, using the description of Egypt found throughout T’nakh, conclude that Avraham was saved from - a furnace!

F: Haran and “Pascal’s Wager”

The final point in the Midrash which we will address is the role of Haran here. He engages in what is commonly referred to as Pascal’s Wager. Blaise Pascal (1623 - 1662), a French mathematician and logician, suggested that it is a good idea to believe in G-d, based on “the odds”. If one doesn’t believe in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will be eternally damned. If, on the other hand, he is right, he will achieve salvation. If, on the other hand, he believes in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will have lost nothing...

Haran’s faith, unlike that of Avraham, is depicted as opportunistic. The point of this segment of the Aggadah is quite clear - declarations of faith are not cut from one cloth and the faith which can withstand the furnace is one which has already been forged by the crucible - not one of momentary convenience.

How do the Ba’alei haMidrash know that this was Haran’s failing? Why couldn’t he have predeceased his father for some other sin?

Since we have no other information about Haran in the text, we have to go to the next best source - Lot, his son.

As we find out throughout the Avrahamic narratives, Lot is someone who always took the easy path and the most convenient road - even if it affected the society he would join and his family.

When Avraham and Lot needed to separate, Avraham offered Lot his choice: “If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will take the left” - meaning that they will divide up the mountain range between north (left) and south (right). Avraham abjured Lot to remain in the mountains, a place of greater faith and solitude (see, inter alia, D’varim 11:10-12). Instead, Lot chose the “easy life” of S’dom, which, at the time, appeared as “the garden of Hashem, the land of Egypt” - lush and fertile. We have discussed the attitudinal implications of his choice elsewhere.

When fleeing from that selfsame city, he begs the angels to allow him to stay nearby, as he cannot go further - and that leads to the shameful scene in which his daughters get him drunk and become pregnant.

We don’t know a lot about Haran, but his son bears the shameful badge of an opportunist - hence, the first child to predecease his father (aside from murder) dies as a result of that opportunistic attitude when applied to the great faith of Avraham.

**כִּי טוֹבִים דָּזִיד מֵין
אָמְרָה כְּנַסְתְּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי הַקָּבָ"ה:
רַבְשׁׁ"ע עֲרִיכִים עַלִּי דָּבְרֵי דָזִיד
זֹהַר מִינָה שֶׁל חֻרָה.**

Noah's Advice: Thoughts on Parashat Noah

In sorting out the genealogical information in the early chapters of Genesis, it turns out that Noah and Abraham were alive at the same time. Abraham was 58 years old at the time of Noah's death.

(Interestingly, the numerical value of the name of Noah is 58!) Did Abraham and Noah know each other? The Torah does not so indicate, and Midrashic literature sheds little light on this question. Here are some of my speculations on this topic.

Abraham would surely have been interested in meeting the venerable old sage who had survived the deluge. In his own search for God, Abraham would have had no better teacher than Noah who God had specifically described as a righteous and pure man. Noah had first-hand experience with God. Indeed, Abraham was a tenth generation descendant of Noah...so Noah was Abraham's great, great etc. grandfather. It would have been strange if Abraham did not know Noah in person.

Noah could have told Abraham about the events leading to the great deluge, in which only Noah and family were spared. He could have described God's sadness about the sinfulness of humanity, how God felt compelled to wipe out the wicked people and re-start the human adventure with Noah and family. As an old sage looking back at his lifetime experiences, Noah might have told Abraham: "What was gained by God's destroying the wicked in the flood? Are people after the flood any better than they were before the flood? Isn't humanity still plagued with idolatry, immorality, violence, theft? If people were supposed to learn the lesson that wickedness is punished...they obviously did not learn it!"

"So what is to be done?" Abraham would have asked. "Is humanity condemned to eternal self-destruction and godlessness?"

"I've thought a lifetime about this," Noah would have answered. "Apparently, God brought the deluge not because He expected humanity as a whole to improve. He is far too wise to expect that. He brought the flood to teach us that it is fruitless to imagine that everything would be different and better if only all the wicked would be destroyed. Things won't be different or better. Floods and vast punishments don't change the basic nature of humanity. So instead of fantasizing about improving humanity by wiping out the idolaters, infidels and sinners, one should rather seek to teach righteousness to people, one by one, day by day, soul by soul. This is painful, frustrating, tiresome...but there is no other way."

"But, grandfather Noah, what is to be gained by struggling against human immorality? Aren't we better off just hiding ourselves away in our own safe enclaves, and let humanity corrupt itself as much as it wishes."

A Midrash sheds light on this: "There were four pious ones at the dor haflaga [generation of building the tower of Babel]: Shem, Ever, Noah and Abraham. Shem, Ever and Abraham hid themselves away...but Noah stood up and endangered himself for the sanctification the Name; he warned the [wicked to cease] but they did not listen to him (Torah Sheleimah, R. Menachem Kasher, vol. 1, p. 500, no. 40)

The Midrash envisions the young Abraham as hiding himself away rather than confronting the idolatrous builders of the tower of Babel. Also choosing to hide were Noah's son Shem, and his great-grandson Ever. These righteous men thought it was pointless to confront the wicked; they did not believe they could succeed. But the old man Noah endangered himself for the sake of Heaven; he chastised the wicked and suffered their abuse. At the end, though, Noah's efforts were futile.

The evil persisted in spite of Noah's impassioned words.

Abraham, Shem and Ever would have come to Noah afterward: "You see! Your protests were worthless. You endangered yourself and aggravated yourself to no avail. The wicked do not listen to the chastisements of the righteous."

Noah would have answered: "I did not chastise them because I thought they would listen. I chastised them so that there would be a record that someone stood up against evil. I chastised them...but really I was chastising myself. I wanted to be sure that I myself would not forget what righteousness and morality are. By protesting against evil, I was reminding myself and strengthening myself so as not to let myself slip into the pervasive evil that surrounds us. Hiding is not a valid option for righteous people. If we don't stand up for truth and Godliness, then the voice of truth and of God will be silenced altogether in our world."

Noah would have looked into Abraham's eyes: "My grandson Abraham, if I have learned anything in my long life it is that God demands that all of us do our best to stand for truth, goodness and morality. I have learned that threats and punishments are generally ineffective in getting people to improve themselves. I have learned that the human condition is innately contaminated with egotism, jealousy, violence, and godlessness. God's great experiment in creating humanity was to see if there would be special souls in each generation who could keep the flame of holiness and truth alive. Such people must be heroic, patient, steadfast in their commitment. Such people must reach out to others...and teach by precept and example. They will gain adherents, even if the majority of humanity remains mired in destructive behavior. This is your task, grandson Abraham. Go out and change the world. Go out from hiding. Confront evil directly. You will suffer greatly in the process...but you will justify your own purpose in life. You will be fulfilling God's command. The future of humanity depends on you, Abraham, and on others who will follow your example."

Abraham would then have kissed Noah's hand and receive his grandfather's blessing. "Thank you, grandfather Noah. You have taught me something important. You have taught me everything I need to know to face my future."

By:

Rabbi Marc D. Angel

[Angel for Shabbat](#)



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PARSHAT NOACH

The **Mabul** (the Flood) and **Migdal Bavel** (the Tower of Babel) are undoubtedly the two primary stories in this week's Parsha. However, each of these two stories is preceded by a list of genealogies that appear to be rather irrelevant.

Furthermore, at the conclusion of Parshat Noach (see 11:10-25) we find yet another set of genealogies (that introduces the story of Avraham Avinu).

In this week's shiur, we explain how these 'sifrei toladot' (lists of genealogies) create a 'framework' for Sefer Breishit and can help us better understand how these stories (i.e. the Flood and Migdal Bavel) contribute to its overall theme.

INTRODUCTION

In our introductory shiur on Sefer Breishit, we discussed the methodology that we employ to uncover the primary theme of each sefer. We begin our shiur with a quick review of those basic steps:

- 1) To identify the primary topic of each 'parshia'
- 2) To group the titles of these 'parshiot' into units that share a more common topic. [Each of these units could be considered as 'chapters' of the book.]
- 3) To group these 'chapter' divisions into larger units that share a common topic or theme [similar to 'sections' of a book].
- 4) To suggest an overall theme of the book, by analyzing the progression of theme from one section to the next.

In our shiur, we will show how the various sets of "toladot" in Sefer Breishit can help us apply this methodology, and can point us in a direction that may help us uncover its underlying theme.

FROM A LIST TO AN OUTLINE

In the following table, we list all of the 'parshiot' in the first seventeen chapters of Sefer Breishit, joining together only the most obvious groups of parshiot by noting their specific and then more general topics.

Study this list carefully, noting how the specific topics can easily group into more general topics:

PSUKIM	SPECIFIC TOPIC	GENERAL TOPIC
1:1-2:3	7 days of Creation	Creation of nature
2:4-3:15	the Gan Eden story	Gan Eden
3:16	Chava's punishment	Gan Eden
3:17-21	Man's punishment	Gan Eden
3:22-24	Expulsion from Gan Eden	Gan Eden
4:1-26	Cain's sin and punishment	Outside Gan Eden
5:1-31	[Toladot:] Adam->Noach	Dor Ha-mabul

5:32-6:4	Man's downfall	[pre-Mabul]
6:5-8	reason for Mabul / Hashem	[pre- Mabul]
6:9-12	reason for Mabul / Elokim	[pre-Mabul]
6:13-8:14	Punishment - the Flood	The Mabul
8:15-9:7	Leaving the Ark	[post-Mabul]
9:8-17	'Brit ha-keshet'	[post-Mabul]
9:18-29	Cham cursed/Shem blessed	[post-Mabul]
10:1-32	[Toladot:] sons of Noach	The 70 Nations
11:1-9	Builders of the Tower	Migdal Bavel
11:10-32	[Toladot:] Shem->Terach	Avraham Avinu
12:1-9	Avraham's aliya	Avraham Avinu
12:10-13:18	Lot leaves Avraham	Avraham Avinu
14:1-24	War of 4 & 5 kings	Avraham Avinu
15:1-21	Covenant/brit bein ha'btarim	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 16	Yishmael's birth	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 17	Brit mila - another covenant	Avraham Avinu

etc.

[To verify this, I recommend that you review this table (and its conclusions) using a Tanach Koren.]

As you review this chart, note how the first set of major topics all relate in one form or other to God's 'Hashgacha' [providence], i.e. His intervention in the history of mankind as He punishes man (or mankind) for wayward behavior.

In fact, just about all of the stories in Chumash (prior to the arrival of Avraham Avinu) relate in some manner to the general topic of 'sin & punishment' ['sachar ve-onesh']. For example, after Creation we find the following stories:

- * Adam & Eve sin & hence are expelled from Gan Eden
- * Cain is punished for the murder of Hevel
- * Dor ha-mabul is punished for its corruption
- * 'Dor ha-plaga' is 'punished' for building the Tower

Afterward, the focus of Sefer Breishit shifts from stories of 'sin & punishment' to God's choice of Avraham Avinu - and the story of his offspring.

ENTER - 'TOLADOT'

However, within this progression of topics, we find a very interesting phenomenon. Return to the table (above) and note how each of these general topics are first introduced by a set of toladot [genealogies]. For example:

- * The **toladot** from Adam to Noach (chapter 5) introduce the story of the **Mabul** (chapters 6->9).
- * The **toladot** or Noach's children (chapter 10) introduces the story of **Migdal Bavel** (11:1-9 / the Tower of Babel).
- * The **toladot** from Shem to Terach (chapter 11) introduce the story of Avraham Avinu (chapters 12-...).

In fact, as surprising as it may sound, even the story of Gan Eden (chapters 2-3) is first introduced by toladot!

"These are the **"toladot"** of the heavens & earth..."
[See 2:4! / note the various English translations.]

Furthermore, later on in Sefer Breishit, we continue to find toladot. Note how we later find: **toladot** of Yishmael (see 25:12); **toladot** of Yitzchak (see 25:19); **toladot** of Esav (see 36:1); & **toladot** of Yaakov (see 37:2).

The following table summarizes this pattern, and illustrates how [some sort of] "toladot" introduces each of the main topics in Sefer Breishit. As you review this table note how the first several topics all relate to 'chet ve-onesh', i.e. God's punishment of man (or mankind) for his sins, while the remaining topics relate to the story of our forefathers - the Avot!

CHAPTERS	TOPIC
=====	=====
2	Toldot shamayim va-aretz
2->4	-> Man in (and out of) Gan Eden

6->9	-> ha-mabul - The story of the Flood
10	Toldot Bnei Noach - Shem, Cham & Yefet
11 12->25	-> Midgal Bavel - The Tower of Babel
11	Toldot Shem until Terach
12->25	-> God's choice of Avraham Avinu
25 -35	Toldot Yitzchak - story of Yaakov & Esav
36	Toldot Esav - story Esav's children
37- 50	Toldot Yaakov - story of Yosef & his brothers

Although this pattern is rarely noticed, these **sifrei toladot** actually create a framework for the entire book of Breishit!

In this manner, the **toladot** introduce each and every story in Sefer Breishit. To explain why, we must first take a minute to explain what the word **toladot** means:

WHAT IS A TOLADA?

The word toladot stems from the Hebrew word 'vlad', a child or offspring. Therefore, 'eileh toldot' should be translated 'these are the children of...'.

For example: 'eileh toldot Adam' (5:1) means - 'these are the **children** of Adam' - and thus introduces the story of Adam's children, i.e. Shet, Enosh, Keinan, etc. Similarly, 'eileh toldot Noach' introduces the story of Noach's **children** - Shem, Cham, and Yefet. [See Rashbam on Breishit 37:2 for a more complete explanation.]

Some of these toldot in Sefer Breishit are very short; as they simply state that the person lived, married, had children and died (e.g. the generations from Adam to Noach). Other toldot are very detailed, e.g. those of Noach, Terach, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Nonetheless, **every** story in Sefer Breishit could be understood as a detail in the progression of these "toladot".

This explanation raises a question concerning the first instance where we find toldot - i.e. **toldot shamayim va-aretz** (see 2:4). How do the heavens and earth have 'children'?

[Note how various English translations attempt to solve this problem when they translate this pasuk!]

The answer to this question may be quite meaningful. Recall that the first chapter of Breishit explains how God created **shamayim va-aretz** (heavens and earth) from 'nothing' (ex nihilo). Then, immediately afterward in the next chapter, we encounter the first use of toldot:

"Eileh toldot ha-shamayim ve-ha'aretz be-hibar'am..." (2:4).

So what does Chumash refer to as the **toladot** of **shamayim va-aretz**, i.e. what are the **children** of heaven and earth?

If we follow the progressive pattern of Sefer Breishit (as illustrated by the above table) then 'toldot shamayim va-aretz' must refer to man himself [i.e. **Adam ha-rishon**], for it is the story of his creation that immediately follows this introductory pasuk!

In other words, Adam ha'Rishon is considered the 'offspring' of shamayim va-aretz. This interpretation could help explain the significance of the pasuk that describes how God created man in **perek bet** (the first topic of this unit):

"And Hashem Elokim formed man from the dust of the **earth** and blew into his nostrils **nishmat chayim** - the breath of life" (see 2:7). This second ingredient may reflect the aspect of man which comes from (or at least returns to) heaven.

In contrast to the story of Creation in **perek aleph**, which features a clear division between **shamayim** [note the purpose of the 'rakiya' in 1:6], the special manner of God's creation of man in **perek bet** may reflect his unique ability to connect between heaven and earth.

[See Rashi on 2:5, where he explains that God created man so that he could pray for rain - in order for vegetation to grow. See also last week's shiur on Parshat Breishit.]

Similarly, the next set of **toladot** - from Adam to Noach (see chapter 5) lead immediately into the story of the Flood. Note how 9:28-29 - the psukim that conclude the Noach story, are clearly part of the same literary unit that began with the toladot in chapter 5 (i.e. they follow the same 'template').

This pattern of "toladot" that introduce stories continues all the way until the very end of Sefer Breishit. Therefore, we conclude that these **sifrei toladot** do more than 'keep the sefer together'; they also help develop the theme of Sefer Breishit.

We will now show how these toladot create not only a framework for Sefer Breishit; they can also help us identify its two distinct sections that create its primary theme. Let's explain:

THE TWO SECTIONS OF SEFER BREISHIT

Despite this successive nature of the **toladot** in Sefer Breishit, they clearly divide into **two** distinct sections.

- 1) God's creation of mankind (chapters 1-11)
w/ stories relating to 'sachar ve-onesh'
- 2) The story of the avot (chapters 12->50)
God's choice of Avraham's offspring to become His nation.

Even though the majority of Sefer Breishit focuses on the family of Avraham Avinu (Section **Two**), in the first eleven chapters (Section **One**), the Torah's focus is on mankind as a whole.

For example, even when Section One includes special details about Noach, it is **not** because he is designated to become a special nation - rather, it is because through Noach that mankind will be preserved. After the flood, the Torah tells us how Noach's offspring evolve into nations, and their dispersing (see chapter 10). Even though we find that Noach blesses Shem and Yefet (see 9:25-27), the concept of a **special** nation with a special covenant does not begin until the story of Avraham Avinu.

In contrast, Section **Two** (chapters 11-50) focuses on the story of **Am Yisrael** - God's special nation. In this section, Sefer Breishit is no longer **universalistic**, rather it becomes **particularistic**.

Therefore, this section begins with **toldot Shem** till Terach (see 11:10-24) that introduce the story of Avraham Avinu, whom God chooses in chapter 12 to become the forefather of His special nation. The remainder of Sefer Breishit explains which of Avraham's offspring are **chosen** [= 'bechira'], e.g. Yitzchak and Yaakov, and which are **rejected** [= 'dechiya'], e.g. Yishmael and Esav].

This explains why Sefer Breishit concludes precisely when this complicated **bechira** process reaches its completion - i.e. when **all** twelve sons of Yaakov have been chosen, and none of his offspring will ever again be rejected.

[This may also explain the significance of Yaakov's name change to Yisrael [see TSC shiur on Parshat Vayishlach.]

Our final table summarizes how the toladot help define these two sections of Sefer Breishit:

I. UNIVERSALISTIC (chapters 1->11) - Creation of mankind

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
1-4	'shamayim va-aretz'	Man in (and out of) Gan Eden
5-9	from Adam to Noach	'dor ha-mabul' - the Flood
10-11	bnei Noach to 70 nations	'dor ha-plaga' - Migdal Bavel

II. PARTICULARISTIC (11->50) - God's choice of Am Yisrael

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
11	Shem to Terach	leads up to Avraham Avinu
11-25	Terach	God's choice of Avraham & Yitzchak
25	Yishmael	*his 'rejection' (dechya)
25-35	Yitzchak	Yaakov and Esav (their rivalry)
36	Esav	* his 'rejection'
37-50	Yaakov	the 12 tribes/ Yosef and his brothers 70 'nefesh' go down to Egypt

However, if our original assumption that each sefer in Chumash carries a unique prophetic theme is correct, then there should be a thematic reason for the progression of events from Section One to Section Two. Therefore, to identify the overall theme of Sefer Breishit, one must take into consideration how these two sections relate to one another.

To help uncover that theme, we must take a closer look at the structure created by these toladot.

SHEM & SHEM HASHEM

Note once again from the above table how each general topic in the first section of Sefer Breishit was first introduced by a set of toladot. In a similar manner, each of these units concludes with an event which in some way relates to the concept of 'shem Hashem'. Let's explain how.

Our first unit, the story of Adam ha-rishon, concludes at the end of chapter four with a very intriguing pasuk:

"And also Shet gave birth to a son and called him Enosh, then he 'began' to call out in the Name of God [az huchal likro be-shem Hashem] (see 4:26).

[Most commentators explain that 'huchal' implies that man began to 'defile' God's Name (shoresh 'chillul'), i.e. they didn't call in His Name properly - see also Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara I:1]

No matter how we explain the word huchal in this pasuk, all the commentators agree that God's intention was for man to 'call out in His Name'. Note, however, how this pasuk concludes the section that began in 2:4 with the story of Gan Eden. Even though man was banished from Gan Eden and Cain was punished for murder, God still has expectations from mankind - man is expected to search for God, to 'call out in His Name'.

Despite this high expectation, the next unit of toladot, which leads into the story of the **Mabul**, shows that man's behavior fell far short of God's hopes. God became so enraged that He decides to destroy His creation and start over again with Noach. This unit which begins in 5:1 concludes in chapter 9 with a special set of mitzvot for Bnei Noach (9:1-7), a covenant ('brit ha-keshet' (9:8-17), and ends with the story of Noach becoming drunk (9:18-29). However, even in this final story (of this unit) we find once again a reference to "shem Hashem":

After cursing Canaan for his actions, Noach then blesses his son Shem:

"Blessed be God, the Lord of **Shem**..." (see 9:26-27).

Now it is not by chance that Noach named his son - **Shem**. Most likely, Noach's decision to name his son Shem was rooted in his hope that his son would fulfill God's expectation that man would learn to call out "be-shem Hashem", as explained in 4:26!

[It is not by chance that Chazal consider Shem the founder of the first Yeshiva, the house of learning where Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov studied, i.e. 'Yeshivat Shem ve-Ever'.]

Noach blesses Shem in the hope that he and his descendants will indeed fulfill this goal. However, once again, we find that the next generation fails. In chapter 10, again we find a unit that begins with toladot - this time the development of the seventy nations from the children of Shem, Cham, and Yefet - and again, just like the two units that preceded it, this unit also concludes with a story where the word "**shem**" emerges as thematically significant, i.e. the story of Migdal Bavel. As we will now explain, in this story, once again mankind is not looking for God; rather they are interested solely in making a 'name [**'shem'**] for themselves!

MIGDAL BAVEL

When reading the first four psukim of the story of Migdal Bavel, it is hard to pinpoint one specific sin: [Note, however, the significant usage of the first person plural.]

"Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shin'ar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, **let us** make bricks and burn them hard... And they said, Come **let us** build **us** a city and a tower with its top in the sky, **and we will make a name for ourselves** - v'naaseh lanu **shem** - lest **we** shall be scattered all over the world. Then God came down to see...." (see 11:1-7).

From a cursory reading, it is not clear exactly what was so terrible about this generation. After all, is not achieving 'achdut' [unity] a positive goal? Likewise, the use of human ingenuity to initiate an industrial revolution, developing man-made building materials, i.e. bricks from clay etc., seems to be a positive advancement of society. Furthermore, there appears to be nothing wrong with simply building a city and a tower. Why was God so angered that He decided to stop this construction and disperse mankind?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). One key phrase in the Torah's explanation of the purpose for the tower reflects the egocentric nature of this generation:

"ve-naaseh **lanu shem**" [**we** shall make a **name** for **ourselves**] (11:4) [see Sanhedrin 109a].

Instead of devoting themselves to the **name of God**, this generation devotes all of their efforts for the sake of an unholy end. Their society and culture focused solely on man's dominion and strength, while totally neglecting any divine purpose for their existence. [See Ramban on 11:4!]

Although this generation's moral behavior was probably much better than that of the generation of the Flood, God remained disappointed, for they established an anthropocentric society (i.e. man in the center) instead of a theocentric one (i.e. God in the center). Their primary aim was to make a '**name for themselves**', but **not** for God.

As God's hope that this new generation would 'koreh be-shem Hashem' - to call out in His Name - never materialized - He instigates their dispersion. God must take action to assure that this misdirected unity will not achieve its stated goal (see 11:5-7). Therefore, God causes the 'mixing of languages' - so that each nation will follow its own direction, unable to unify - until they will find a common goal worthy of that unity.

AVRAHAM IS CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE

Our analysis thus far can help us identify the thematic significance this Migdal Bavel incident within the progression of events in Sefer Breishit - for the very next story is God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become His special nation!

In a manner similar to the earlier stories in Chumash, the story of God choosing Avraham Avinu is first introduced, and not by chance, by tracing his genealogy back ten generations - so that it will begin with **Shem** - the son of Noach! The thematic connection to "shem" becomes obvious.

From this perspective, the story of Migdal Bavel should not be viewed as just another event that took place - so that we know how and when the development of language began. Rather, this story 'sets the stage' for God's choice of Avraham Avinu, for it will become the destiny of Avraham, the primary descendent of toldot **Shem**, to bring God's Name back into the history of civilization; to 'fix' the error of civilization at Migdal Bavel!

Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan, the Torah informs us of how Avraham Avinu ascends to Bet-El and builds a mizbeach where he 'calls out in God's Name':

"And Avraham came to the Land, to Shechem... and God spoke to him saying: 'To your offspring I have given this Land...' and Avraham traveled from there towards the mountain range to the east of Bet-el... and he built there an altar - and CALLED OUT IN THE NAME OF GOD"

[See 12:8 (and Ramban), compare 4:26].

Similarly, it should not surprise us that when the prophet Isaiah describes the 'messianic age' (see Isaiah 2:1-5) - he speaks of unity of mankind:

- when all nations will gather together once again, but this time to climb the mountain of God (not a valley)
- arriving at the **city** of Jerusalem - to its special **tower** - i.e. the Bet ha-Mikdash - 'the place that God has chosen for **His Name** to dwell there' [see Devarim 12:5-12]
- thus rectifying the events that took place at Migdal Bavel.

And when the prophet Tzefania describes ultimate redemption, we find once again an allusion to Migdal Bavel: 'ki az ehpoch el amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. (see 3:9)

In our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha we will continue this discussion, as we will discuss in greater detail the purpose for God's choice of Avraham Avinu. Till then,

shabbat shalom
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In light of our discussion, we can better appreciate a puzzling statement made by Ben Azai:

"Zeh sefer **toldot** ha-adam..."

It is taught - R. Akiva says, 've-ahavta le-rei'acha kamocha' - **love your neighbor as yourself** - klal gadol ba-Torah - This is a **great principle** of the Torah.

Ben Azai says, 'zeh **sefer toldot** ha-adam' (5:1) - klal gadol mi-zeh - is an even **greater** principle.

(Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4).

How could one suggest that the very technical list of the genealogies from Adam to Noach found in Breishit 5:1-32 constitutes even a principle, let alone one more important than the famous dictum that one should love his neighbor as himself?

One could suggest that Ben Azai's statement is not referring specifically to the genealogies, but rather to the overall structure of Sefer Breishit as formed by the **toldot**, and thus its theme. Although it is very important to 'love thy neighbor', the theme of Sefer Breishit - that Am Yisrael must lead all mankind to a theocentric existence - is an even greater tenet of our faith.

B. What other parallels (or contrasting parallels) can you find between Yeshayahu 2:1-6 and the story of Migdal Bavel? [Be sure to relate to 'bik'a' and 'har' as well!]

C. See Tzefania 3:8-9 and its context, especially 'ki az ehpoch el amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. How does this relate to our explanation of Migdal Bavel?

Now, see Sefer Breishit. Note how he explains the progression of events from the Mabul until God's choice of Avraham Avinu! Does it become clear how the Sefer Breishit understood this pasuk in Tzefania!!

[Be sure to find where he 'quotes' it.]

D. Am Yisrael is later commanded in Sefer Dvarim to establish the mikdash 'ba-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shachein **shmo** sham!' (Dvarim 12:5,11). Relate this to the above.

See also Shmuel II 7:22-27 and Melachim I 8:42-44).

E. The suggested thematic connection between Migdal Bavel and the bechira of Avraham Avinu is supported by the Midrash that states that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized God for the first time. Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died (see Rashi on 10:25), which according to Chazal corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel - 1996 to bryiat ha-olam. Recall that Avraham was born in year 1948!

F. In case you 'can't wait' until next week, some preparation for next week's shiur on Avraham Avinu & **shem Hashem**.

Note that when Avraham Avinu first arrives in Eretz Yisrael, he builds a mizbeach at Bet-El and calls out be-**shem Hashem** (12:8). After his sojourn in Egypt due to the famine, Avraham returns to this mizbeach at Bet-El and once again calls out be-**shem Hashem**! (13:4 / see also 21:33).

After reading this entire section (12:1-13:4) carefully, try to explain why Bet-El is the focal point of Avraham's aliyah.

for PARSHAT NOACH - 3 additional shiurim

SHIUR #1

TOLADOT BNEI NOACH 'Setting the stage' for Sefer Breishit

After reading the opening pasuk of chapter ten: "ayle toldot bnei Noach..." [These are the generations of the children of Noach] - one would expect to find a balanced listing of the various children of Noach's three sons (and possibly some of their notable grandchildren as well).

We would also expect for this chapter to divide into three paragraphs (or "parshiot") - each one dedicated for the genealogies of each of Noach's three sons: Shem, Cham and Yefet.

However, as we study this chapter, we'll discover that we don't find what we 'expected'. Instead, we find a very 'unbalanced' listing, and a very 'lopsided' division into 'parshiot'.

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why, and how the names that are detailed in this chapter help 'set the stage' for what will transpire later on in Sefer Breishit.

INTRODUCTION

Take a quick glance at chapter ten, noting how it divides (as we expected) into three 'parshiot' [see 10:1-14, 10:15-20, and 10:21-32]; but then take a more careful look at the first 'parshia', noting how it includes the descendants of BOTH Yefet and Cham; while the second 'parshia' discusses ONLY the children of Canaan (even though he was only one of Cham's many children). Note as well how the third (and final) 'parshia' is dedicated solely to the offspring of Shem.

[It's also rather interesting how YEFET branches out to what later becomes Europe (i.e. 'Yavan'=Greece etc.), CHAM branches out

to what later becomes Africa (Mitzraim = Egypt; Kush = Ethiopia etc.) as well as the seven nations of Eretz Canaan. Finally, SHEM branches off into Mesopotamia (and Asia Minor).]

SPECIAL DETAILS

Even though the description of Yefet's offspring is straightforward, i.e. the Torah details his children and some of his grandchildren; the genealogy of Cham clearly puts an emphasis on Nimrod, most likely because he enters Mesopotamia, even though the rest of his family remains in Africa; or possibly because he will later become one of the builders of the Tower of Babel (see 10:10-12/ note Rashi and Ramban!).

In the second 'parshia', we also find a unique detail, as the Torah outlines the geographical area where Canaan's children settled - most likely because God will later promise this 'land of Canaan' to Avraham (see 17:8). Therefore we find not only the names of all of Canaan's children, but also their borders. [Similarly, the Torah had earlier described Cham as the 'father of Cannan' (in the story of when he is cursed by his father/ see 9:22-25).]

Most bizarre is the Torah's presentation of the descendants of SHEM (see 10:21-30). Instead of describing Shem's own children and grandchildren, this final "parshia" seems to focus instead on the children of EVER, who was only one of Shem's numerous great grandchildren! To verify this, first note the emphasis on this point in the very opening pasuk of this section: "And SHEM also had children, he [SHEM] is the [fore]father of ALL the children of EVER..." (see 10:21)

Then the 'parshia' quickly lists SHEM's own children, focusing on ARPACHSHAD - who gives birth to SHALACH - who gives birth to EVER. (note 10:22-25). We find no detail of Shem's grandchildren, other than Arpachshad. However, we do find minute detail concerning EVER's own two sons: PELEG and YOKTAN. Then we are told of the reason for PELEG's name (clearly this relates to, and sets the background, for the Migdal Bavel narrative that follows in chapter 11). Then, the Torah enters

minute detail of all of the children of Yuktan ben Ever [thirteen in total] AND where they lived (see 10:25-30).

Just like CANAAN and his children became the Torah's 'key' descendants of Cham, EVER and his children become the 'key' descendants of Shem.

[Note (in chapter 11/ you might need a calculator), how Ever outlives most of his great grandchildren. (He is the last person to live over four hundred years; from the next generation onwards, life-spans seem to drop in half to under 200.) These observations are supported by Chazal's identification of Ever as the 'co-headmaster' of the very first YESHIVA (of 'SHEM & EVER')!]

'SETTING THE STAGE'

Clearly, this entire unit (i.e. chapter ten) is not merely listing the grandchildren of Noach. Rather, this presentation provides a 'background' for events that will later unfold in the book. For example, God promises Avraham "ha'IVRI" (see 14:13 - a descendant of **Ever**) - that one day his offspring will be charged to inherit the land of **Canaan**, in order to fulfill their divine destiny. [Most likely, the name "Ivrim" also refers to a descendants of Ever (see 39:17, 40:15, 43:32, and Shmot 5:1-5!).]

Finally, one could also suggest that chapter 10 also serves as an introduction to the story of Migdal Bavel (see 11:1-10). To prove this, simply note 10:5,10,20,31,32. This also may explain why Chazal identify Nimrod as one of the key builders of that Tower.

[Regarding the 'correct' chronological order of the events recorded in chapters 10 and 11, note Radak on 10:32, see also Rashi & Ramban on 11:1 (& our self study questions).]

In conclusion, don't let what may appear to be a 'boring' set of psukim in Chumash fool you. They usually contain much more than first meets the eye.

SHIUR #2

THE 'PESHAT' OF 'DERASH' on the word "HU'CHAL"

In our weekly shiur on Parshat Noach (sent out earlier this week), we discussed the importance of the word "shem" and its usage in the last pasuk of chapter four. To review that point, review once again the final two psukim of chapter four, noting how they conclude the first 'unit' (chapters 1-4) of Sefer Breishit: "And also Shet gave birth to a son, and called him Enosh - AZ [then] **HUCHAL** [soon to be translated] to call out in the Name of God". (see 4:26)

At first glance, the translation of this pasuk appears to be quite straightforward, i.e. the word HUCHAL means BEGAN [like "I'hatchil" - to begin], and hence, the Torah now informs us that in the time of Enosh man **began** to 'call out in God's Name'. And indeed, Rashbam and Ibn Ezra explain this pasuk in this manner. [Note English translations of JPS and Jerusalem Bibles, in contrast to that of the Stone Chumash.]

Nonetheless, the classic commentators (as well as several Midrashim) interpret this pasuk in the opposite direction, understanding that the word "HUCHAL" implies the **defilement** of God's Name (shoresh "chilul" -see Targum Unkelos). For example:

- * Rashi - Man began IDOL WORSHIP by calling god's name on certain objects and/or people.
- * Rav Saadyah Gaon - calling in God's Name became DEFILED.
 - * Ramban - Man NULLIFIED ["bitul"] God's Name.
 - * Rambam - Man began IDOL worship [Hilchot Avodah Zara I:1] [According to Mesechet Shabbat [see 118b], the generation of Enosh typifies a society of idol worshipers!]

At first glance, these interpretations seem rather 'stretched'. After all, this pasuk is the first time in Chumash that we finally find (what appears to be) a POSITIVE statement concerning the progress of mankind. Why then do Chazal read this pasuk in such a NEGATIVE light?

To answer this question, and to better appreciate Chazal, we posit this 'negative' interpretation stems from the Torah's use of two key 'biblical phrases':

- 1) "az huchal" , and
- 2) "l'kro b'shem Hashem"

Had these two phrases not been found anywhere else in Sefer Breishit, then most likely everyone would have agreed to the 'simple' interpretation (as suggested by Rashbam) that man BEGAN to call (or pray) to God. However, we will see how the word "hu'chal", and the concept of 'calling out in God's Name', appears numerous times in Sefer Breishit, and hence, those sources must be taken into consideration when interpreting this pasuk (see again 4:26).

Let's begin with the word "hu'chal", noting how it is used in a NEGATIVE context each other time that it is mentioned in Parshiot Breishit and Noach.

BEFORE THE FLOOD

Immediately after the Torah introduces Noach (see 6:1-4), we find another interesting use of "hu'chal":

"va'yhi ki HE'CHEL ha'adam..." - And it came to pass as man began to multiply... and gave birth to daughters..." (6:1)

This pasuk introduces the story of the MABUL with God's anger with man for his behavior (hence limiting his life span to 120 years). [Note Rashi who explains that the 120 years relates to the Flood itself!]

Even though "he'chel" clearly implies a 'beginning' (see Ibn Ezra), there can be no doubt that this pasuk introduces the beginning of a NEGATIVE process! [See Ramban.]

AFTER THE FLOOD

In a similar manner, immediately after the Flood, note how the Torah introduces its description of the incident of Noach and Canaan (i.e. when he becomes drunk/ see 9:20-27): "VA'YACHEL Noach ish ha'adama" - Noach, the tiller of the soil, BEGAN to plant a vineyard..." (see 9:20)

Here again we find the BEGINNING of a 'downward' process. Even though Rasag and Seforim explain "va'yachal" as 'began', Rashi (quoting the Midrash) explains "va'yachel" as "chulin" - that he defiled himself.

BEFORE MIGDAL BAVEL

In the next chapter, when the Torah lists the genealogy of Noach's grandchildren, we find yet another use of the word "ha'chel" in the description of Nimrod: "And Kush gave birth to Nimrod, HU HA'CHEL - he BEGAN - to be a GIBOR [strong/brave man] on earth... His kingdom began in Bavel..." (see 10:8-11!)

Here, "ha'chel" clearly implies a 'beginning', yet as we all know (and as the pasuk alludes to in its mention of Bavel), Nimrod is most probably the mastermind behind the Tower of Babel Project. [See Rashi 10:8, note also shoresh "mered" [revolt] in his name "nimrod" / note also Ibn Ezra on this pasuk!]

Once again, we find the beginning of a 'downhill' process.

AT MIGDAL BAVEL

Finally, when God 'comes down' to punish the builders of MIGDAL BAVEL (see 11:1-9), we find yet another use of "hu'chal": "And God came down to see the city and the tower... and He said, it is because they are united... v'zeh HA'CHILAM la'asot - and this caused them to START this undertaking, and now nothing will stop them... (see 11:5-6)

Once again, we find that the Torah uses specifically this word to indicate the beginning of a process that is against God's will!

BACK TO ENOSH

Based on these four examples where the Torah employs the word "hu'chal" to describe the BEGINNING of a DOWNHILL process, it should not surprise us to find that Chazal offer a similar explanation in 4:26, that the generation of ENOSH began to 'defile' God's Name, rather than exalt it.

"LIKRO B'SHEM HASHEM"

Let's examine now the second phrase of this pasuk - "l'kro b'shem Hashem" - as it will provide us with additional support for why Chazal understand this event as such an important 'milestone' in the history of idol worship.

Recall from Parshat Lech L'cha how this very same phrase is used when Avraham Avinu arrives at (and returns to) Bet-El:

"...and he built there an altar to God, and he called there in God's Name [va'yikra b'shem Hashem] " (see 12:8)
[See Ramban on this pasuk, see also 13:3-4 and 21:33.]

As the prophet Tzefania himself later explains, this concept becomes the ultimate goal of the Jewish nation: "For then I will unite all the nations together that they speak the same language so that they all CALL OUT IN GOD'S NAME - I'kro kulam b'shem Hashem - and to serve Him with one accord" (see Tzefania 3:9/ see also I Kings 8:41-43).

[See also the "v'al kein nekaveh" prayer that we add after reciting "aleinu l'shabeach" - "v'chol bnei basar YIKRU B'SHMECHA" - .]

If our understanding is correct - that Avraham Avinu is chosen to rectify mankind from the direction taken by the builders of Migdal Bavel, then thematically it makes sense to explain the pasuk concerning the generation of Enosh (4:26) in a negative light, for Avraham is chosen not only to fix the sin of "v'naaseh lanu SHEM" (see 11:4), but also to teach mankind what they had misunderstood since the time of Enosh, the sin of "az hu'chal I'kro b'shem Hashem...".

For a more complete explanation, simply read the entire first chapter of the Rambam in Hilchot Avoda Zara (in Sefer MADA). As you study that Rambam, note how that entire chapter reflects his interpretation of Sefer Breishit!

Finally, if you have time, read Seforno's introduction to Sefer Breishit. It is simply a masterpiece. As you study it, note how he relates to the above pasuk from Tzefania 3:9 as well as 4:26 and the 11:4! Note as well how attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of the primary theme of Sefer Breishit.

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SHIUR #3 - TOLADOT BNEI NOACH [Chapter Ten]

After we read the opening pasuk of chapter ten: "ayle Toldot Bnei Noach...", we would expect to find a simple listing of the Noach's grandchildren, and maybe even some of his grandchildren. We also find that this chapter divides into three distinct "parshiot" that we would expect to divide evenly among Shem, Cham and Yefet.

Nevertheless, when we study this chapter we uncover some rather interesting details, that we may not have otherwise expected.

First of all, note how the first "parshia" includes the descendants of both Yefet and Cham, while the next "parshia" discusses only Canaan. Note as well how YEFET branches out to what later becomes Europe (i.e. Greece etc.), CHAM branches out to what later becomes Africa (Mitzrayim, Kush = Egypt, Etheopia etc.) as well as the seven nations of Eretz Canaan. Finally SHEM branches off into Mesopotamia (and Asia Minor).

Even though the description of Yefet's offspring is straightforward, the genealogy of Cham clearly puts an emphasis on Nimrod - most likely becomes he becomes the builder of Migdal Bavel, and because he enters Mesopotamia, even though the rest of his family remains in Africa (see 10:10-12/ note Rashi and Ramban!).

We also find extra details concerning Canaan, for Chumash will later explain how God gives the land of Canaan to Avraham (note 15:18-20). Therefore we find not only the name of Canaan's children, but also the borders of their land.

Hence we conclude that the descendants of CHAM focus on Canaan his children. [Note how this relates as well to 9:22-25 where the Torah describes Cham as the 'father of Cannan' throughout the story of Cham's sin against his father.]

Even more interesting is the Torah's presentation of the descendants of SHEM (see 10:21-30). Note how the focus of this entire "parshia" describing bnei SHEM actually focuses almost exclusively on EVER, his great grandson! First of all, note the opening pasuk:

"And SHEM also had children, he [SHEM] is the [fore]father of ALL the children of EVER..." (see 10:21)

Then the 'parshia' quickly lists SHEM's own children, focusing on ARPACHSHAD - who gives birth to SHALACH - who gives birth to EVER. (note 10:22-25). We find no detail of Shem's grandchildren, other than Arpachshad. However, we do find minute detail concerning Arpachshad's son EVER, his two sons: PELEG and YOKTAN. Then we are told of the reason for PELEG's name (clearly this relates to, and sets the background, for the Migdal Bavel narrative that follows in chapter 11).

Then, the Torah enters minute detail of all of the children of Yuktan ben Ever [thirteen in total] AND where they lived (see 10:25-30).

Just like Canaan and his children became the Torah's 'key' descendants of Cham, Ever and his children become the 'key' descendants of Shem. [Hence, it should not surprise us that we find that CHAZAL speak of the YESHIVA of 'SHEM & EVER'.]

Clearly, this entire unit (i.e. chapter ten) is not merely listing the grandchildren of Noach. Rather, in its presentation of his grandchildren we are also setting the stage for the story in Sefer Breishit that will follow - whereby God promises Avraham Avinu - a descendant of Ever - that one day he will be charged to inherit the land of Canaan, in order to fulfill a divine destiny.

Furthermore, this most likely explains what the Torah refers to in later references to an "Ivri", as in "Avram ha'ivri" (see 14:13). This appears to be a general name for the descendants of EVER. [Note as well from the ages of the people mentioned in the genealogies in chapter 11 how Ever outlives all of his great grandchildren. He is the last generation to live over four hundred years, for in the next generation man's lifespan seems to drop in half to under 200.]

Finally, one could also suggest that chapter 10 also serves as an introduction to the story of Migdal Bavel. To prove this, simply note 10:5,10,20,31,32. This also may explain why Chazal identify Nimrod as one of the key builders of that Tower. [Regarding the 'correct' chronological order of chapters 10 and 11, note Radak on 10:32, see also Rashi & Ramban on 11:1 (and our questions for self study).]

In conclusion, don't let what may appear to be a 'boring' set of psukim in Chumash fool you. They usually contain much more than first meets the eye.

shabbat shalom,
Menachem

Parshat No'ah: Creation Unzipped

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

QUICK REVIEW:

Contrary to what some people assume and contrary to the way in which we usually hear the term used, Parashat Bereshit hints that "tzelem Elokim" (humanity's being created "in the image of God") is not something handed to us as a gift and a privilege; instead, it is a mission for which we are equipped with tools and which we are commanded to achieve. This mission demands that we emulate Hashem in three ways: 1) creativity (procreativity), 2) asserting control over the world, and 3) behaving morally.

A DOSE OF REALITY:

Parashat Bereshit, last week's parasha, ends on an ominous note; ironically, the parasha which we identify most with creation ends on the brink of destruction. This week's parasha, Parashat Noah, is the parasha of the Flood, the great destruction of the world. Perhaps we think of the Flood as some sort of great rollicking adventure, Noah and his swashbuckling family aboard the Ark with hundreds of exotic animals. But the real story is not a laughing adventure, it's a picture of death and horror. Floods, as we know from hearing the news about hurricanes or tropical storms or torrential rainfall, or from witnessing them ourselves, kill people: rivers overflow their banks, roads become impassable, buildings become weakened and collapse, people are trapped and swept away by powerful currents. The Flood covered the highest mountains with water, leaving people with no escape.

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT:

We start with the reason for the destruction, which appears at the very end of last week's parasha:

BERESHIT 6:5-7 --

Hashem saw that the evil of Man was great in the land, and all the inclinations of the thoughts of his heart were all evil all day. Hashem regretted having made Man in the land, and He was sad in His heart. Hashem said, "I will wipe out Man, whom I have created, from upon the face of the land; from Man, to animal, to crawling animal, to bird of the sky -- for I regret having made them."

It couldn't be clearer that humanity has failed its mission and disappointed Hashem. (Obviously, there is a major theological issue to explore here -- Hashem's "disappointment" -- but since this is a parasha shiur, not a philosophy shiur, we will take the Torah's expression at face value and leave it for another time.) As we saw last week, the punishment for violating and renouncing the tzelem Elokim mission is death: humanity does not have the choice of either achieving tzelem Elokim or becoming animals. The only option is to be human -- which by Hashem's definition means tzelem Elokim -- or to be nothing. The animals seem to be condemned along with humanity because they are created to serve humanity; if humanity is to be destroyed, they serve no purpose.

THE FLOOD: MANIFESTATION OF A DEEPER DESTRUCTION:

BERESHIT 6:11 --

The world was destroyed before Hashem, and the world was full of violence. Hashem saw the world, and it was destroyed, because all flesh had destroyed its path in the land.

The description above might mistakenly be thought to describe the world once the Flood has already come. But in fact this is how the Torah describes the world *prior* to the flood. In a certain sense, the job of destroying the world is already done. Even though Hashem has not done a thing yet, destruction has already taken place on the most fundamental and significant level -- the world is "destroyed" in a moral sense. The actual Flood comes only to make true in a physical sense what is already true in a spiritual and moral sense. Humanity has already destroyed the world; Hashem comes merely to make this destruction physically manifest. In this sense, the Flood is less a punishment than merely a consequence of sin, merely the visible side of the destruction already wrought by humanity.

PLANNING AHEAD:

We turn to a section just before the Flood begins, where Hashem gives instructions to No'ah:

BERESHIT 7:1-6 --

Hashem said to Noah, "Come, you and all your household, to the ark, for I see you as righteous in this generation. Of all pure animals, take seven-seven, man and wife, and of the animals which are not pure, take two, man and wife. Also of the birds of the sky, seven-seven, male and female, to keep alive seed on the face of the Earth. For in seven more days, I will rain upon the land . . . And the Flood was water upon the Earth.

In case you do not have the full text before you, this section is a repetition. Hashem had just said the same thing to No'ah in the previous section. But two significant elements appear in this section which do not appear in the previous section:

- 1) The command to bring along seven pairs of the pure animals.
- 2) The explanation that the animals are to be brought into the Ark in order to re-establish life on Earth.

This second point is crucial because until now, there had not been any hint that there would be an end to the Flood! All Hashem had told No'ah until now was that there would be a Flood, that he should build the Ark, and that he should take all the animals aboard in order to save their lives. The section above is the first indication that the destruction of the world is not forever, that Hashem intends to re-establish the world eventually. In this context, it is particularly fitting for Hashem to command that seven pairs of the pure animals be brought; the reason No'ah will need so many more pure than impure animals is because he will need to bring sacrifices to Hashem after the Flood ends, and sacrifices can come only from among pure animals. At the same time that Hashem hints that the destruction will end and that the world will be re-established, He provides No'ah with the means to find favor in His eyes by bringing sacrifices.

THE "UNZIPPING" OF THE WORLD:

We now move to the theme which occupies most of Parashat No'ah: the Flood itself. The destruction caused by the Flood is not a "random" destruction; it is not merely a powerful force unleashed on the world to wreak havoc. Instead, it is a careful, divinely planned *unraveling* of the Creation -- playing the same movie in reverse, le-havdil. The first step:

BERESHIT 7:6 --

... And the Flood was WATER UPON THE EARTH.

This particular phrase -- "mayyim al ha-aretz," "water upon the Earth," appears *thirteen* times during the parasha! In terms of the theme we are trying to develop -- that the Flood is a reversal of Creation -- the phrase "mayyim al ha-aretz" is significant as the reverse of one of the steps of Creation. If we jump back to the story of Creation in Parashat Bereshit:

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

Hashem said, "Let the waters be gathered from under the heavens to one place, and let the dry land be visible"; and it was so. Hashem called the dry land "Land," and called the gathering of waters "Seas"; and Hashem saw that it was good.

While Creation withdrew the water from the land and confined it within given boundaries, making life possible on dry land, the Flood reverses this process and makes life on land impossible: "water upon the earth."

THE NEXT STEP:

BERESHIT 7:10-11 --

And it was, after those seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the land . . . All the springs of the great deep were broken open, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

The water which becomes the Flood comes from two different sources -- 1) "the springs of the great deep," indicating the seas and other sources of water within/on the Earth and 2) "the windows of the heavens." Sources of water deep within the Earth break open and gush forth as the heavens "open" and rain pours down in torrents. The gushing forth of the "springs of the deep" should remind us of the gathering of the water to the seas, as the breaking open of the springs reverses this process. And the opening of the heavens should remind us of one of the steps of Creation reported in Parashat Bereshit:

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

Hashem said, "Let there be a firmament within the water; it shall divide between water and water." Hashem made the firmament, and it divided between the water below the firmament and the water above the firmament; and it was so. Hashem called the firmament "Heavens" . . .

The atmosphere ("the heavens") separated between the water below -- oceans and lakes -- and the water above -- the water which composes the clouds. In bringing the Flood, this separation disappears; the two bodies of water (oceans and clouds) reach toward each other, the seas rising and the rain of the clouds falling, to join and blot out the space in between -- the dry land.

Let us continue in Parashat No'ah:

BERESHIT 7:13-14 --

On this very day came Noah, Shem, Ham, and Yafet, Noah's sons, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them into the ark. They and all the wild animals ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and all the tame animals ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and all the crawlers which crawl on the ground ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and all the birds ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, all birds, all winged.

The way this list of creatures is formulated (and the similar list of creatures) should remind us of the original process of Creation:

BERESHIT 1:25 --

Hashem made the beasts of the land ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and the tame animals ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and all crawling things of the ground ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIES, and Hashem saw that it was good.

What we have here in Parashat No'ah is not a reversal of this process, it is a repetition: this list of creatures is to be saved from destruction and set aside to re-establish the world. On the other hand, the Torah repeats this list of creatures half a dozen times through the parasha, often when telling us who is being destroyed; used in that context, the list is indeed a reversal of the Creation process.

Bereshit 7:19-20 covers a reversal we have already seen. Here, instead of gathering to one place, the water becomes "ungathered" and covers the ground. Instead of the land appearing from under the water, as in the Creation process, the ground disappears under the water:

BERESHIT 7:19-20 --

And the waters grew very mighty upon the land, and all the tall mountains under the heavens were covered. Fifteen cubits above did the waters grow mighty, and the mountains were covered.

Finally, 7:22 reverses the ultimate Creation process: "Anything which had a soul of breathing life in ITS NOSTRILS . . . DIED" (7:22). This is the diametric opposite of the crowning step of creation: "And Hashem formed the Man of dust from the ground, and he breathed INTO HIS NOSTRILS a LIVING soul, and the Man became a LIVING creature" (2:7).

CREATION, TAKE II:

Once all life (besides what floats in the ark) has been destroyed, it is time for the world to be re-established. What we find now, not surprisingly, is a pattern of processes which repeat the original processes of Creation.

BERESHIT 8:1 --

Hashem remembered Noah and all the wild animals and tame animals with him in the ark, and Hashem passed a wind over the Earth,

and the waters calmed.

The passing of the calming wind over the waters -- a small step toward recreation -- parallels one of the earliest phases of Creation I:

BERESHIT 1:2 --

And the Earth was empty and chaotic, with darkness on the face of the deep, and a WIND of Hashem swept over the face of the water.

The next step is for the sources of the floodwaters (the springs of the deep and the water of the heavens) to be closed once again:

BERESHIT 8:2 --

And the springs of the deep and windows of heaven were closed

This parallels the original separation between the undifferentiated waters into two great gatherings of water: the atmosphere and the oceans:

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

Hashem said, "Let there be a firmament within the water, and it shall divide between water and water." And Hashem made the firmament, and it divided between the water below the firmament and the water above the firmament, and it was so. And Hashem called the firmament "Heavens"

The next step of the Noahide recreation process is for the land to reappear:

BERESHIT 8:5-14 --

The water became less and less, until the tenth month; in the tenth [month], on the first of the month, the mountaintops could be seen And it was, in the 601st year, in the first [month], on the first of the month, the waters dried from upon the ground. And in the second month, on the 27th day of the month, the ground was dry.

This clearly parallels the original ingathering of the water to reveal the land beneath:

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

God said, "Let the waters be gathered from under the heavens to one place, and let the dry land be visible," and it was so. God called the dry land "Land" and called the gathering of waters "Seas," and God saw that it was good.

Now that the Creation process is complete for the second time, Noah, his family, and all of the animals emerge. Noah sacrifices some of the animals of the pure species to Hashem:

BERESHIT 8:21-22 --

Hashem smelled the pleasant smell and said to Himself, "I will no further curse the ground because of Man, for the inclinations of the heart of Man are evil from his youth. And I will no longer punish all living things as I did. For all the days of the world, planting and sowing, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."

Hashem 'realizes' once and for all that Man is not what he is "cracked up to be." In the beginning of the parasha, we saw a similar statement -- Hashem is disappointed in humanity and regrets having created Man, so He decides to destroy just about everyone. By now, Hashem 'realizes' that destruction is "not the answer." In order to avoid being disappointed, Hashem decides to downgrade His expectations of humanity even further. What can you expect from a being whose basic nature contains evil? Man learns nothing from destruction, since his basic nature includes a powerful evil inclination.

But what is the solution to the problem? If the purpose of creating humanity was to create a form of life which could and would emulate Hashem, isn't the whole experiment a failure? Is Hashem saying that Man can't be punished for failing the mission because his nature is evil?

Not necessarily. Note that our parasha is the turning point between two phases of Hashem's relationship with humanity: in phase one, he creates humanity and assigns it a mission: to reflect the divine. Kayyin (Cain) is the first to fail this mission: he murders his brother, but seems to learn little from Hashem's reaction, as he neglects to impress upon his children the value of human life; his grandchildren continue his murderous pattern. Adam and Hava react by attempting to replace their first two children with a third child: Shet, who is described by the Torah as "created in the image" of Adam, who himself had been created in the image of God. Shet is Adam's hope; success in the tzelem Elokim mission rides upon his shoulders. But after several generations, humanity degenerates into violence and corruption, convincing Hashem that He had made a mistake by creating humanity. Hashem appears to preserve some hope for humanity, as he saves the life of Noah and his family. But Noah, too, disappoints Hashem, founding the new world only to plant a vineyard and stupefy himself with the wine it produces. Hashem now waits, as the generations pass -- He waits for someone like Avraham, whose appearance marks phase two of Hashem's relationship with humanity. At some point between Noah and Avraham, Hashem gives up the notion that ALL of humanity can achieve the ideal, that ALL of humanity can maintain a relationship with Him as reflections of His divinity. Hashem decides that the great experiment of humanity can continue only with a small, select group of subjects. Hashem now looks for an individual or group of individuals to set an example for the rest of the world. Avraham is that individual; he and the nation he will found are selected for intimate relationship with Hashem. The rest of the world has shown that it is unable to maintain such a relationship, so Hashem now turns his attention to a select group. The aftermath of the Flood is the turning point at which the idea of an "Am Segula," a most-favored, most-treasured nation, takes shape. The damp soil of the Flood is the fertile ground from which sprouts the seed of Kelal Yisrael.

Shabbat shalom

Parshas Noach: Rebuilding the World: Analyzing the Two Stories of the Flood

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. TWO STORIES - AGAIN???

As we encountered in last week's Parashah, the main story of our Sidra - the flood and its aftermath - seems to be told twice, in conflicting versions. The existence of these "rival versions" can best be demonstrated by using each to answer basic questions about the flood and its aftermath: (We will refer to "V1" and "V2" here; the thread which binds them will be suggested later on.)

A: THE NATURE OF EVIL

Q1: What caused God to decide to destroy the earth?

V1: "The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness...for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth" (6:11-12)

V2: "Hashem saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time" (6:5)

In the first "version", we are told about specific actions and behaviors that warranted destruction. Our Rabbis explain that the "Hashchatah" mentioned here was sexual impropriety of the most egregious sort; the "Hamas" (lawlessness) refers to thievery - for which the Heavenly decree was finally sealed.

In the alternate "version", we are not given information about specific behaviors - just general "Ra'ah" (evil). In addition, a factor not mentioned in the first "version" is presented - man's "thoughts".

B: THE MERIT OF NOAH

Q2: What was Noah's merit?

V1: "Noah was a righteous and wholehearted man in his age, Noah walked with God" (6:9)

V2: "Noah found favor with Hashem...for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation" (6:8, 7:1)

In v. 9, Noah is described as "righteous" (*Tzaddik*) and wholehearted (*Tamim*), walking "with God". This description speaks of someone who is committed to the principles of justice and honesty and who walks in God's path (see later 18:19).

The verse immediately preceding it (the last verse of Parashat B'resheet) addresses a different aspect of Noah - not his "objective" merit, rather, how God "sees" him. *Noach Matza Hen b'Einei Hashem* - Noah found favor in God's eyes - is a much more sympathetic and subjective statement. Even the later statement (7:1), when God addresses Noah, speaks more about their relationship - *Tzaddik l'Phanai* - righteous BEFORE ME - than does the earlier one.

C: HOW MANY ANIMALS?

Q3: How many animals did Noah take onto the ark?

V1: "And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you, they shall be male and female; from birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive" (6:19-20)

V2: "Of every clean (*Tahor*) animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not clean (*Asher Lo T'horah*), two, a male and its mate." (7:2)

The differences here are clear - not only numerically, but also teleologically. What is the purpose of "collecting" the animals? In the first version, two animals of each kind are gathered in order to maintain the species (hence, one male and one female).

In the second "version", the purpose of gathering these animals only becomes clear after the flood - to offer a thanksgiving "Korban" with the pure animals.

Note that in the first version, the terms used for male and female are the "clinical" *Zakhar* and *N'kevah*, terms which say nothing about the relationship between them. On the other hand, the second "story", where animals are classified by ritual definitions and seven pairs of the "pure" animals are taken, also refers to the "couples" as *Ish v'Ish'to* - a "man and his mate".

D: COVENANT - OR COMMITMENT?

Q4: What caused God to commit to never again bring a flood of total destruction? (and to whom did He make this commitment)?

V1: "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come and with every living thing that is with you - birds, cattle and every wild beast as well - all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. I will maintain My covenant with you; never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth...This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come,. I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. That - God said to Noah - shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established

between Me and all flesh that is on earth." (9:9-17)

V2: "Then Noah built an altar to Hashem, and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. Hashem smelled the pleasing odor, and Hashem said to Himself: 'Never again will I doom the earth because of Man, since the devisings of Man's mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done. So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.' (8:20-22)

Here we have a clear and obvious difference between the "versions". In the first "story", God enters into a covenant with Noah - who is presented as a representative of all living beings and of the earth itself. God makes a covenant, complete with a visible sign (the rainbow), wherein He agrees to never again destroy the earth (at least - not with a flood). The motivation for this covenant isn't readily obvious - unless we include the commands which immediately precede this section. These commands, which serve as a "flashback" to the creation of Man, include the prohibition of murder and the responsibility to judge such behavior. (8:4-6)

In the second "version", on the other hand, there is a clear "catalyst" for God's commitment - the pleasing odor of the offerings brought by Noah. In addition, the commitment which God makes is not stated to anyone, nor is there any "covenant" form to it - there is nothing which Man is asked to do in response, nor is there any sign of the covenant. God makes this commitment "to Himself", as it were; the commitment is grounded in the tragic reality of man's imperfection - "...since the devisings of Man's mind are evil from his youth..."

SUMMARY

A cursory reading of chapters 6 through 8 of B'resheet present two different pictures of the flood: Why it happened (lawlessness or "evil intentions"); the merit of Noah (walking WITH God or righteous BEFORE God); the number and purpose of the animals (2 - to save the species - or 7 pairs - for offerings) and the Divine promise to never repeat the flood (covenant or commitment).

The careful reader will note - at least if he follows in the original - that the Name for God used throughout "Version 1" is "Elohim", the generic name for God. The Name used throughout "Version 2" is "Hashem" (YHVH).

How many stories are there here? Are there two different narratives - or one multifaceted one? Bottom line - how many animals were there? What was Noah's merit? Which "version" is "accurate"?

(It is both prudent and imperative to note that most of the Rishonim who addressed the issue utilized the same approach here to the "two stories" of Creation in last week's Parashah. They combine the two versions, seeing each as completing what is "missing" from the other. We will try to present another viable option here)

II. SCIENCE VS. TORAH

CONFLICT OR ILLUSION?

Before addressing the specific question of the "two stories" of the flood, a larger question (to which we alluded last week) should be addressed.

Much has been made of the apparent conflict between Science and Torah. In clearer terms, since the world has embraced the methods of scientific reasoning and has been willing to challenge a fundamentalist reading of the Bible, these two versions of reality have been constantly thrown against each other. Is the world 6,000 years old - or several billion? Were there six days of creation - or many trillions? Did Man evolve from "lower species" or was he formed ex nihilo as the crown of creation?

[Before asking these questions, we could challenge the Torah's report from its own information - was Man created before or after the animals? etc. - as presented in last week's shiur]

Responses to this apparent problem have fallen into three groups:

GROUP A: THE REJECTIONISTS

There are those who maintain that the Bible must be understood as being a literal account of creation, the flood etc. Besides the internal contradictions, this clearly pits the Biblical account against science. This leaves adherents to this perspective with two options - either accept the Biblical account in toto - and reject the findings of the scientific world - or else reject the Biblical account in toto. Each of these "rejectionist" approaches is rarely confined to the issues in question - someone who believes that the Bible is trying to promote a specific version of creation - one which he rejects on account of science - will not be likely to accept the Biblical mandate in other areas of wisdom, ethics or personal obligations. Similarly, someone who rejects the scientific approach to creation, evolution etc. out of hand is not likely to "buy into" the scientific method in other areas.

The result of this first approach is the rejection of one or another of the disciplines as the bearer of truth.

Although some of our fellow traditionalists have opted for such an approach (to the extreme of maintaining that God placed fossils on the earth in order to test our belief in the age of the world!), most contemporary Orthodox thinkers are too committed to the scientific method as a valuable expression of "Creative Man" (see the introduction to last week's shiur) to reject it so totally.

GROUP B: THE INTEGRATIONISTS

Of late, there has been a good deal of study and literature devoted to an attempted harmonization between the disciplines of Torah and science. Usually building on Ramban's commentary on B'resheet, works such as "Genesis and the Big Bang" try to demonstrate that the latest findings of the scientific world are not only corroborated - they are even anticipated - by the Torah.

(A marvelous example of this is Ramban's comment on the phrase "Let us make Man in Our Image", troubling enough on theological grounds. Ramban explains that God is talking to the earth, creating a partnership whereby the earth would develop the body of Man

and God would, upon completion of that process, fill that body with a Divine spirit. The notion of the earth "developing" the body is curiously close to the process outlined by Darwin - in the widest of strokes.)

The advantages of this approach over the first one are obvious - there is no need to reject either area of study and a person can live an intellectually honest life as a member of "modern society" without sacrificing religious creed.

The "downside" is not so clear. Besides some "forced" readings (in both disciplines - bending science to work with Torah is sometimes as tricky as "bending Torah" to achieve compatibility with science), this method actually "canonizes" the products of the scientific method; since the claim is that these theories are already found in the Torah, that makes them somewhat immutable. What happens when (not if, but when) a particular theory which we have "identified" in the Torah - becomes outdated in the world of science? Will we still hold on to it, claiming religious allegiance?

Although the integrationist school has won many adherents in the recent decades, I believe that the danger outlined above - along with resting on a very questionable foundation - makes this approach a shaky one at best.

GROUP C: THE THEOLOGISTS

Before asking any of these questions - about contradictions within the text or conflicts between our text and the world of scientific hypotheses - we have to begin with a most basic question - what is the purpose of the Torah? Why did God give us His golden treasure, which existed for 974 generations before the creation of the world (BT Shabbat 88b)?

This question is not mine - it is the focus of the first comments of both Rashi and Ramban on the Torah. The assumption which drives each of their comments is that God's purpose in giving us His Torah is to teach us how to live (note especially Ramban's critique on Rashi's first question). Besides specific actions to perform or avoid (i.e. Mitzvot), this includes proper ethics, attitudes and perspectives - towards each other, our nation, the earth and, of course, towards the Almighty.

Shadal (R. Sh'muel David Luzzato, 19th c. Italy) put it as follows:

"Intelligent people understand that the goal of the Torah is not to inform us about natural sciences; rather it was given in order to create a straight path for people in the way of righteousness and law, to sustain in their minds the belief in the Unity of God and His Providence..."

Therefore, our approach to issues of "science vs. Torah" is that it is basically a non-issue. Science is concerned with discovering the "how" of the world; Torah is concerned with teaching us the "why" of God's world. In clearer terms, whereas the world of science is a discipline of discovery, answering the question "how did this come to be?"; the world of Torah is concerned with answering a different question - "granted this exists, how should I interact with it?" (whether the "it" in question is another person, the world at large, my nation etc.).

Based on this principle, not only do we not regard the concerns of science as similar to that of the Torah, we can also approach apparent contradictions in the Torah with renewed vigor and from a fresh perspective.

Since the goal of the Torah is to teach us how we should live and proper beliefs about God and His relationship with the world (and the relationship we should endeavor to have with him), then it stands to reason that "multiple versions" of narratives are not "conflicting products of different schools" (as the Bible critics maintain); rather they are multi-faceted lessons about how we should live - different perspectives (and different lessons) of one event.

III. THE "TWO ADAMS"

We will need one more brief interlude before responding to our question about the flood narrative.

The goal in creating Man (Adam) was twofold. As we read in the "combination" of creation narrative(s), Man was to be a commanded being - facing God, having a relationship with Him, a relationship which includes both commandedness and guilt, loneliness and reunification (Adam II in Rav Soloveitchik's scheme). At the same time, he was to be a majestic being, bearing the Image of God and acting as His agent in the world (Adam I).

Neither of these goals were met. Not only did Adam fail to observe the one command with which he was commanded - and failed to own up to his responsibility in that regard - but his progeny violated the most basic principle of God's agency - the maintenance and furthering of the natural and social order - when he murdered his own brother.

These double "failings" continued for generations until God decided to "wipe man from the earth" - but not before identifying the seeds of a new hope. Noah was to be the next Adam, with the possibilities for both types of human ideal (majesty and humility) potential in him.

We can now return to our questions.

IV. BACK TO NOAH

Why did God decide to destroy the earth?

From the perspective of man's duty to maintain and promote the order-out-of-chaos of Creation - "The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness...for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth". Man had failed to promote order, violating

both sexual and social (financial) boundaries.

But also - "Hashem saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time". Man had also failed to develop spiritually, to grow in his relationship with the Almighty.

This easily explains why Noah was chosen:

On the one hand, he was the one person in that generation who "walked WITH God" - promoting the righteousness and perfection of Creation. On the other hand - he "found favor in God's eyes" and was "righteous BEFORE Me" - he was able to stand in front of God as a righteous servant.

We now understand the dual purpose of taking the animals on to the ark. As "majestic Man", God's agent in the world, Noah took two of each kind - one male and one female - in order to insure continuation of each species. As "worshipping Man", standing before God and focussed on a dialogic relationship with Him, he took "clean animals" for purposes of worship.

We also understand the covenant and commitment presented in the aftermath of the flood. Noah, who stands before God in worship, is pleasing to God and God responds by committing to never again disrupt the seasons. God "realizes" that Man is incapable of the sort of perfection previously expected - and He "fine-tunes" the rules by which the world is governed.

But Noah is also the (potential) embodiment of "Majestic Man", who acts not only his own behalf as a worshipper, but also on behalf of all existence as their "king". With this king, God enters into an explicit agreement (King to king, as it were), complete with a publicly displayed sign of that covenant. That covenant, however, comes with a codicil - Man must live by the basic rules of God's order, filling and dominating the land but taking care never to shed the blood of a fellow. Ultimately, God says, I will act to correct the order if you do not - the world is Man's to perfect, but God will intervene to act if Man fails in this task.

The Torah tells us two stories - because there are two different relationships and duties being re-evaluated here.

In Man's role as God's agent, where God presents himself as "Elohim", the God of all Creation, it is his lawlessness and reckless abandon of the order of Creation which must be corrected. In order to do so, Creation is "reversed" (the "upper waters" and "lower waters" are no longer divided) and must be reestablished, by taking the one man who promoted that order, having him take enough of each species to repopulate the earth and forging an agreement with him by which such destruction would never again take place. Man, for him part, is responsible for the promotion of God's order on earth.

In Man's role as God's servant, where God presents himself as "Hashem", highlighting Divine compassion, it is his failure to develop himself spiritually which must be corrected. To that end, the one man who is "righteous BEFORE Me" is saved - along with enough animals that will afford him the opportunity to re-forge the relationship of worship.

The Divine hope that Noah would prove to be a successful "second Adam", embodying both roles, was only realized ten generations later, with the entrance of Avram/Avraham onto the scene. We look forward to meeting this giant among men next week.

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