

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 11 #2, October 20, 2023; 5 Chesvan, 5784; Noach

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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**Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of nearly 200 hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Rabbi David Fohrman and AlephBeta.org produced a podcast this week exploring connections in evil between Hamas and parshat Noach. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully, with the help of Hashem.**

For my introduction to Sefer Bereishis last week, I investigated some parallels in the parsha and later in the Torah that connect to good and evil – an appropriate focus on the first Shabbat after Hamas' pogrom against our people. This week, Rabbi David Fohrman and Imu Shalev (CEO of AlephBeta.org) have introduced a podcast on connections between parshat Noach and Hamas. (I have not yet had an opportunity to listen to the podcast, but I hope to do so before Shabbat.) Rabbi Fohrman mentions in particular that the Hebrew word "chamas" means violence – an appropriate definition of Hamas.

Parshat Noach contains two stories. It opens with the story of the flood and closes with the Tower of Babel. In both situations, Hashem intervenes in response to dangers from humans. From God's initial work creating a place for humans (plus animals and vegetation), the world and humans in it quickly become evil. God decides to undo the world and start over. The steps of destroying the first world parallel exactly the steps of God's creating the world, but in reverse (repeating the same words). Hashem follows the same steps to create a second world, with some subtle differences. God then permits Noach to open the teva and initiate a new world. This new world also starts a downward spiral. The parsha ends with people from numerous cultures living together in the plain of Shinar. The people decide to work together to make bricks and build a tower to show their greatness. On the surface, the people seem to be honorable. They live together in peace, work together on projects, and discover new types of technology. Why does God see a need to intervene and stop what they are doing?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents the best explanation I have ever seen of why the people of Shinar are evil. In chapter 10, the Torah reports that the people spread out and that each group has its own language. In chapter 11, suddenly we find that everyone has a common language. Using a variety of sources, Rabbi Sacks finds that the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal II *"made the totality of all peoples speak one speech."* A cylinder inscription of Sargon II indicates that he imposed a common language and culture on all the small nations that Assyria conquered. Rabbi Sacks deduces that when God mixes up the languages of the builders of the Tower of Babel, He is restoring the traditional cultures and languages of the nations that the Assyrians had stifled. God tells Noach and his descendants to disperse and settle the

land – thereby developing different cultures to provide diversity in the world. This diversity is what the people of Shinar destroy, and God wants to stop the process from going any further.

Hamas represents a return of the spirit of “chamas” from the Torah – the evil of violence. Hamas wants to destroy Israel and other non-Arab cultures – exactly what Rabbi Sacks interprets as the basic ill of the people of Shinar. After killing all the Jews and taking over Israel, Hamas wants to go after the United States and other countries that do not follow what Hamas represents. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine’s view is consistent. He states that there is a red line that no culture may pass, that doing so is pure evil and that every society must recognize. When a group passes this line, intellectuals and politicians must recognize that such a group is evil and that there is no excuse for tolerating them.

After the evils of the generations following Noach, God turns to a “plan C” – start with a few decent, honest, just individuals who will inform others of the evils in society and influence them to work for a better world, one dedicated to Hashem (rather than to human glory). Over time, hopefully these good individuals will help make the world a better place, one dedicated to God and His values, one that works to eliminate evil. For the remainder of the Torah, we turn to Avraham, his descendants, and his legacy.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, recognized evil when it reached our community, and he strongly spoke out against evil in our community and abroad. He was a chaplain in the Navy and looked forward each summer to his reserve duty with the men who served our country. He was a strong influence on my son Evan, when he decided to serve our country (but in the Air Force rather than on a ship).

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.**

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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### **Noach: Constant Taking is Self Destructing**

By Rabbi Dovid Green, z”l \* © 5759

We all relate to the misery we feel when we suffer from a cold. The constant runny nose, sneezing, and fatigue tend to demand our attention and remind us how really uncomfortable we feel. It has the ability and the tendency to affect our

whole attitude. Imagine receiving a phone call on one of those miserable days with the news that you won a major lottery, and you will have no financial worries for the rest of your life. I believe that even under those unpleasant circumstances most of us would manage to be full of cheer.

The question then is, why aren't we constantly ecstatic with our lives? We all possess things which we would never sell for even the worth of the highest lottery, so why don't we celebrate? I'm referring to the wonderful gifts we receive every day. We wake up, we can see, we have mobility, we can breath, digest, pass waste, and literally thousands of functions which we take completely for granted without a thought. Aren't these functions more vital to us than any sum of wealth? We know they are, because we have all seen what it's like when some of these functions don't work correctly. Yet we still often find reason to be disillusioned despite that fact that we win the lottery in the biggest way each time we awake, and each time we draw a breath.

Generally this comes from self-centeredness. The passage states as follows. *"For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth"* (Genesis 8:21). One interpretation explains that the word "from" in the passage explains why the inclination of man's heart is evil. Man's inclination is evil because of his youth. In other words, he refuses to grow up. Children are born self-centered. It is normal and necessary. However, as we get older we are expected to become other-centered. Marriage and children facilitate that process. If we refuse to grow up, the old selfish habits remain strong and we remain "takers" instead of "givers."

This was the problem before the time of the Great Deluge in the days of Noach. *"And G-d said to Noach, the end of all flesh has come before Me, for the world is filled with corruption"* (Genesis 6:13). Rashi explains that this refers to robbery. Everyone was taking. Everyone felt that it was all coming to him. The entire world was unfortunately a world of "takers." This went directly against the purpose for which the world was created. *"The end of the world has come before me."* It was not G-d's retribution, but it was a natural consequence of the deeds which that generation embraced. It came, as it were, on its own.

G-d tells Noach to build an ark. It should be populated with every form of life which existed on earth. All of their foods were stored aboard the ark. Who had the job of feeding such a huge population of creatures? Noach and his family did. Day and night Noach, his wife, his sons, and their wives, fed animals. This went on for over a year. Why? Why couldn't G-d use an alternative plan? Why was the survival of life made dependant on Noach and his family working non-stop, day and night?

Rabbi Dessler explains that this was necessary for the survival of all life. As we stated earlier, the basis of the sin of this generation was selfishness. The only circumstances which could save the world was one in which humankind in microcosm would exercise complete selflessness. These were the circumstances which Noach and his family were placed in – such that only their most basic needs could be addressed, and the animals' needs would dominate. This was the wisdom behind the "mini-world" that was created in the ark. This was the true fulfillment of the purpose of the creation of the world, and it was the foundation upon which the new post-deluge world would be built.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5759-noach/>

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## Why God Would Rather Just Have the Salad

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021, 2023

The classic metaphor for America used to be that of the melting pot.

People came from all different countries, cultures, backgrounds, and languages. They would come to America, and they would get homogenized and Americanized into one indistinguishable whole.

Now a different metaphor has gained preeminence, and that is the metaphor of the salad bowl. What makes a salad bowl beautiful and tasty is its combination of different ingredients, all of which retain their distinctiveness. There are cucumbers and tomatoes and lettuce and onions, and those different flavors coming together and integrating without losing their distinctiveness create an even more beautiful whole.

Why is this relevant?

In this week's parasha, we find the story of the Tower of Babel. In the story, it is not clear how exactly the people sinned. Were they trying to storm the heavens, as some people understand?

The actual text makes it sound as if the nature of the people's sin is very clear. The text implies that the people sinned by desiring to stay in one place and be one people in defiance of the divine vision for them. As the prior verses say, that divine vision would entail that the people would spread out throughout the lands. Ideally, the people, their children, and their children's children would cultivate their own various cultures and languages. In the story of the Tower of Babel, however, the text says that the people only had one language. They said to one another, "*Let's build a building,*" and it was with one type of message. Everybody was on the same page. Everybody was saying the exact same thing.

In the story, God reacts by saying, "*This is very dangerous,*" because now the people can do whatever they want.

Now, what does that mean?

On the one hand, this danger may manifest as a demagogue who acts as the head of a group of people with one way of thinking and one language. If this group of people does not tolerate any dissenting voices, then the situation could lead to terrible destruction. Consider Adolf Hitler, yimach shemo (may his name be obliterated), in Nazi Germany. Another serious consequence of group-think is that it also leads to a loss of the richness of what the world could be. God wants there to be multiple languages, multiple cultures, and multiple practices. It is via this divine will that the world contains different, diverse peoples and diverse visions of what the world could be. In the divine vision for the world, those varying visions are brought together into a type of cultural salad bowl. We are diverse, but with a real unity.

Here lies the difference between unity and uniformity. We want unity. We don't want to go to war with other nations, but we don't want uniformity. We want the richness that comes from different cultures, their arts, their sciences, their ways of speaking, their perspectives on the world. This is ultimately what the divine vision is.

I think the lesson of Babel is critically important for how we think about the world and how we think about others. Rather than investing in a homogeneous community, whether it is in our shuls or our friendship circles, we should instead consider the value of building a community with members of different and distinct backgrounds and cultures, so that we can cultivate diversity and unity at the same time.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/10/noach5784/>

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## **When Societies Implode: Thoughts for Parashat Noah**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The Torah describes the destruction of humanity in the days of Noah. It wasn't due to idolatry or blasphemy but to the general breakdown in interpersonal relations. People were hedonistic and promiscuous. They robbed and cheated each other.

The basic lesson of the Noah story is that humanity is capable of bringing on its own destruction. The deepening of corruption is insidious. A midrash suggests that thievery began on a seemingly small scale. People would take “*free samples*” of merchandise, not bothering to pay the merchant. They did not bother to consider that if all others were doing the same thing, the merchants would go broke and would be unable to provide goods in the future. People did not realize that theft — even on a small level — contributes to the overall breakdown of a society’s economic well-being.

The Torah alludes to the general breakdown in sexual morality. The strong and powerful took advantage of the weak. Women were treated as objects of gratification rather than as human beings with rights and feelings of their own.

A rabbinic teaching has it that Noah spent one hundred and twenty years building the ark. During this interval, he called upon people to repent their ways; but they ignored him or reviled him.

Societies (and empires) unravel when people lose trust in each other. This is seldom an abrupt dissolution, but — as in the times of Noah — a gradual breakdown in elementary decency. When cheating becomes rampant, when scammers fiendishly plot to rob others, when government officials and police take bribes to pervert justice — a society is in the throes of self-dissolution. Petty shop-lifting proliferates; smash and grab thieves grow ever more impudent; armed robbery and murder undermine society’s feeling of wellbeing. Law enforcement weakens, the justice system declines.

Societies implode slowly, almost without noticing, when sexual license becomes “*normal*,” when personal gratification becomes the main bond between humans. Often, the sexual license is promoted as a sign of liberation and freedom of expression. People can and do rationalize many negative things into positive. But that doesn’t change the underlying breakdown in social interaction.

When anyone calls attention to the factors leading to the implosion of society, he or she may feel like Noah building his ark. Few pay any attention. The corruption gets deeper and deeper until it eventually reaches a point of no return. The forces for good are simply overwhelmed.

The Torah describes the destruction of humanity as God’s punishment of pervasive immorality. But the ongoing lesson is that humanity is itself capable of bringing on its own demise. The Noah story is a warning to all future generations — including our own. If basic human decency, honesty and trust are lacking, the foundations of society dissolve. When cheaters cheat and exploiters exploit, they threaten all society. When a society allows the negative forces to prevail, it sows the seeds of its own destruction.

One Noah wasn’t able to turn his generation around, just as lone voices today are not able to stop the erosive trends. But if enough Noahs will stand strong, perhaps the negative forces can be set back.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

**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](http://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.**

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3170>

## Noah's Advice: Thoughts on Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

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, whom 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.*”

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/noahs-advice-thoughts-parashat-noah>

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### **Noach -- Theft -- The Red Line of G-d**

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

The generation of Noach was in deep trouble. Society had deteriorated to lawlessness on so many levels. People followed their urges with no societal norms or regulation. G-d declared that the deterioration had gotten so bad that He would bring a flood to destroy the world and start again.

Interestingly, the verse records that theft was the violation that finalized the harsh verdict. Other violations, as serious as they were, were tolerated. G-d, in His benevolence, is quite patient. Why is it that theft caused G-d to bring the Flood?

Many answers have been given to this question. Why indeed was theft G-d’s “*red line*” -- when society crossed that line, G-d was no longer willing to be understanding of their violations?

I would like to suggest what I believe is a very elementary answer. G-d was willing to be tolerant of so many misbehaviors that society slipped into because somehow, people might not understand the gravity of the violation. There was idol worship; there was immorality. As bad as these are, perhaps people thought it was okay. Maybe they thought that they were worshiping G-d's emissaries (see Rambam, *Avodah Zorah* 1:1-2). Maybe they thought that consenting people are not immoral. They were wrong, sorely mistaken, but there was room for patience. But when people made theft a way of life, it undermined humanity and life. That is something everyone should realize. At that point G-d said, "*You should have known better.*"

Theft is not limited to taking someone else's money. Taking someone else's money, or spouse, or life (murder or hostage taking) are all part of a category of violations that are the breakdown of society. Even someone not in tune with spirituality knows that. When this category of violation became rampant, G-d said, "*Enough! On this you should have known better.*"

The October 7 pogrom in Israel is a modern-day example of something that should be absolutely evident to all as tragic and barbaric. Yet there are some groups, particularly in universities, that try to invoke understanding. The anti-Israel propaganda machines continue to incite, and in the name of free speech some administrators choose to tolerate it. The lesson of the Flood is that there does need to be a "*red-line*" at which we no longer say that bad behavior can still be a misunderstanding. At some point we declare both to the terrorists and to those who are reluctant to condemn them and their supporters, "*You should know better.*" In our time we say little about idol worship and immorality. But barbaric murder, hostage taking, and use of human shields, should qualify as beyond tolerable. One would think...

I would be curious to know how university debate teams work. They debate issues and then, if you lose, do you go to the other dorm rooms and kill? I am wondering if a student asks to have his seat changed in class, and the teacher refuses, would it be understandable if he comes in the next day and shoots the teacher dead? Are we supposed to be understanding and say, "*He was acting upon his anger... he had an urge.*" Or are we to recognize that humans are expected to control anger and urges, and that some behaviors are simply beyond the "*red line*" even if we are not particularly spiritually adept.

Spirituality, morality, separation of church and state, each man and his own truth, are all topics to be discussed. In the story of the Flood, G-d informs us that He has great patience with humanity as we make mistakes in the journey of life. But when it comes to theft of money and life, it is not a topic of understanding and patience. What we are encountering is evil, propaganda, and tolerating incitement. On this we say, "*You should have known better.*"

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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### Noach: Set Your Sights

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2022

Towards the end of this week's parsha we are given a brief overview of the descendants of Noach's children and of where each family settled. The families of each of Noach's three sons settled in different areas. However, we find one exception in Ashur. Although, Ashur was a descendant of Sheim, the Torah tells us that he left the four cities established by Nimrod and established four cities of his own. (Bereishis 10:11-12)

The Medrash in Bereishis Rabba 37:4 explains that the Torah is highlighting the righteousness of Ashur. After Nimrod established his four cities, he gathered all of mankind together and began building the Tower of Bavel. It was at this point that Ashur left. The Tower of Bavel was intended as an attack against G-d, and Ashur did not want anything to do with it. He was so uncomfortable with their plans and ideas that he decided he had to leave. The Medrash explains further that the four cities which Ashur established were a reward from G-d for his great sacrifice in separating from civilization. When Ashur left, Hashem swore to him, *“You left the four cities (of Nimrod)! By your life, I will repay you and give you four!”*

The Medrash then notes that Ashur's descendants did not follow in his footsteps, and generations later they turned against G-d. At the time of the destruction of the Temple, Assyria – Ashur's descendants – were among the nation's which sought to destroy us. The commentaries note that King David hinted at this in Tehillim. In Psalm 83, when listing the nations who sought to destroy us, King David says, *“and also Assyria has joined them.”* (83:9) Even Assyria, whose ancestor had been devoted to G-d, eventually turned against G-d and sought to destroy us because we are G-d's nation.

The Medrash concludes with a difficult statement:

*“When Assyria joined the other nations in the destruction of the Temple, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to him, ‘Yesterday you were a chick (maturing) and now you are an egg (unhatched)! Yesterday you were blossoming with mitzvos and good deeds, and now you are encased in sins! I am astounded! Therefore, ‘They will be the children of Lot forever’ (Tehillim 83:9) – cursed!”*  
(Lot in Hebrew means curse. This is the end of the verse above – *“And also Assyria has joined them.”*)

The Medrash is telling us that two millennia after Ashur left Nimrod, G-d is astounded to see that his descendants acted differently and joined in the destruction of the Temple! Yet, Ashur was just one man who had long ago passed away. No matter how great his influence may have been, new influences continuously arise. As time went on, each generation had their own free will and their own choices to make. Why is it so hard to understand how nations can change over two thousand years?

Certainly, we understand that G-d's cry of astonishment was not for the fact that they were able to sin. Rather, G-d's astonishment is that they did not draw inspiration from their own heritage. Their nation began with a man who had left the entire world behind for G-d. How could they not reflect on this and realize how far they had come?! Had they reflected on their own history, when they saw the nations seeking to destroy G-d's Temple, they never would have been able to bring themselves to join. They would have said to themselves, *“Our ancestor was so mature (a chick), how can revert to such spiritual immaturity (like an unhatched egg)?!”*

This Medrash gives us new meaning as we begin studying the lives of our own ancestors in the Book of Bereishis. As we study their lives, we can reflect on their commitment to G-d, the sacrifices they made and the love of G-d they displayed. Our nation was not established by one righteous man – but by our three righteous patriarchs and four righteous matriarchs. While we may not be able to live up to their lofty levels, we certainly don't want to desecrate their memories. We have a glorious and noble heritage. We should take great pride in knowing where we come from. With G-d's help, may we all merit to be worthy of our heritage.

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\* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

## Noach

By Rabbi Herzl Heftter \*

[Note: Rabbi Heftter was unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Heftter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.]

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://www.har-el.org). To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## Messages from and About Israel

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

### Why Israel Will Overcome!

By R. Haim Ovadia

There are no words. We are grieving and mourning, and all the optimism and spirit of unity, the support of Jews all over the world, and the resilience of Israelis, cannot change that.

We should all be mourning for at least 30 days – Shloshim.

We should all say the Mourners' Kaddish, even if our parents are alive.

We should not shave or take a haircut.

I believe that we all feel guilty for being able to enjoy the little things in life, to be alive, to hug our kids and shower them with kisses and love. We should mourn, but at the same time we should fight. We should help Israel and support it in any way possible. Financially, morally, politically, spiritually, physically.

But! We should not despair! We have survived, persevered, and overcame greater obstacles throughout our history, and most of the time, there was no one there to stand for us. Thrown from country to country, from the hand of one dictator to the other, tortured, exploited, harassed, and mocked, we kept our traditions and our learning, strove to do good with one another and never sought to destroy or harm.

The Torah has taught us to choose life! To live for the purpose of doing good. Not because it is going to save our souls, but because in the long run it is going to save the world. History has proven it, over and over again. Those who are motivated by the engine of evil eventually destroy themselves and disappear. Those who are motivated by the engine of good continue to survive and thrive, if not as individuals, as a community.

Following the 1929 massacres in Israel, Uri Zvi Greenberg, one of the greatest modern Hebrew poets, wrote a series of poems addressed to our Arab neighbors. In one of them, titled "The Prophecy of the Son of Blood – on Arabia," he explains, or better yet predicts, the course of the future State of Israel and the Jewish People. UZG writes that we will not retaliate with the same brutality of our enemies, and that our purpose in life is not to be soldiers, warriors, or conquerors. He writes that our goal is to build cities and communities, plant families and fruit trees, and because this is our aspiration, we will have to be soldiers as well.

Everyone in Israel knows that if we had a guaranteed peace, all soldiers would gladly put down their weapons and dedicate their life to family, productivity, and the betterment of mankind.

We have tried offering peace. We extended our hand. It was not rejected; it was bitten with vicious barbarity. Our enemies sank their teeth in our hands, our hearts. For such viciousness there is no forgiveness. There is no purgatory to cleanse their atrocities.

We will fight back. We will win. And we will keep working for peace with anyone who cares to join us and who understands that by letting terror reign in one corner of the world, they are inviting it to take over the whole world.

This, we will not let happen!

Though you drove your rusty sword through my bodies, and I got up to bury my slain brethren in my hands and I am alive and I seeing the burning remnants of the houses, and my widows, and the precious children orphaned, Alas, I, the Hebrew, will not repay like you when the day of Arabia comes. Unlike your deeds, Arabia, in Hebron and Tzefat, as you slaughtered in Motza and tormented Be'er Tuvya, to sever organs of the living and burn it, that I cannot...

Your bloods, Arabia, the murderous, do not come of a source of pure gold, it is not as my bloods which were distilled by prophecy and poverty! it comes from the bloods of your foxes in the vineyards, the bite of their teeth, from the venom of asps and secrecy of scorpions. I dreamt and still I am dreaming: Yerushalayim is built on paved streets, on asphalt the Shekhina strolls not on ruins among caves between one and another donkey vineyards in its mountains, olives and all kinds of fruit trees, many children at the homes and many animals in the pasture - -

And meanwhile I built an unprotected quiet and green village, quiet and green – and lonely...And because I have dreamt a dream, I have not built a wall and the life-purpose of a soldier I have not yet known now I know that village after village I shall build and it will become the wall of the wall. And the hand of the plower and his life-purpose in the field.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Here are some messages from an Israeli chat created to uplift people's spirit:**

## From an Israeli Father:

## A letter from dad:

To all my five dear sons who are now at the front, and of course my dear son-in-law, who is truly a son to me. I wanted to tell you that I love you so much, and I am equally proud of you for being at the head of IDF's spear... Your amazing kids are with us, and we enjoy them. It is amusing to see you in them every now and then...

This morning I woke up earlier than usual, and with the coffee in the kitchen I realized that you, who are fighting now at every site – you are not alone. I am not referring to your comrades but to the invisible warriors, the Jews of all generations who could not fight for themselves. They were the Jews of the Jewish quarters who were massacred and raped by their neighbors and could not fight back. What alternative did Jewish families in England had more than 800 years ago, when they chose to commit suicide with their children rather than let them fall into the hands of their Christian neighbors? In Spain, Jews ascended the Auto-da-Fe, the firepit, and cried out Shema Yisrael, and in the previous century Nachum, Saba Shlomo's brother, with his wife and the whole Polish family who hid them, were burned alive.

The victims of the mob attacks in Israel, the pogroms of the diaspora, and the persecutions all over the world maintained their Judaism despite everything. Even though they were slaughtered because of their faith and had no way to retaliate.

All of them, together with beautiful Suleika of the Maghreb and Moyshe'le of the ghetto, his hands raised, are crying out to you, whispering behind your shoulders: Win!

In the mass graves, in the soil of the accursed lands of diaspora, the lips of the massacred are murmuring, along with the ashes of those burned in Treblinka: win! Please, for us, win! We could not fight back! Please revenge our blood!

My thoughts were disrupted as the sun rose and your charming tots woke up. I then understood that we must do it for them as well, so it will never happen again! So they could live better without existential threats.

Ignore the background noise and those confounded Jews. Fight back...

It is now your turn, my dear children, please win so no one in the world will dare raise his hand on a Jew...

### **To be the Wife of a Soldier, Right Now**

To be the wife of a soldier, right now, is to carry out the daily tasks as much as possible, while in my head I think only of him.

It is to be scared, to worry, to mentally run through scenarios yet smile and try to focus on the positive.

It is to go through the day successfully but in the evening, in bed, break to pieces.

It is to yearn and know that the longing could continue for a month without us seeing each other.

It is to try to busy yourself constantly to suppress the infinite worry.

It is to force feed yourself because there is no choice, though you have no appetite.

It is to hear of another soldier and another soldier who were killed and fight the horrible thoughts in your head.

It is to wait for a whole day or days for one phone call, which ends in minutes, and it is not enough for you.

It is to quietly cry when he says he must hang up, to sound calm and uplift his spirit, while in reality I am crying, not wanting the call to end.

It is to convey strength and faith when in your heart you only want to cry.

It is to do things that make you feel good, even if they are small or marginal, because anyway your heart is shrinking.

It is to be an optimist, to imagine the crazy trip we are going to take when all this is over, the amazing Hodaya (thanksgiving) Party, the Shabbat together, vacation.

It is to trust him, believe in him, know that he is the best there is and let him know that.

It is to believe in HaShem who protects and accompanies him.

It is difficult, it rattles you, it is exhausting.

It is a mission, it is a Zchut, it is strength, it is faith.

To be the wife of a soldier right now is simply being there for him, and for you!

### **Yinon, Israeli soldier:**

Friends, please!!!! Urgent!!!

Our battalion ran out of mango and passion fruit, Nike socks and Adidas sneakers. We also have a severe shortage of shampoo for dry and curly hair and of hand cream for delicate skin. If someone can organize a donor, please contact me...

)I am allowed to laugh a bit... we have endured so much in the last couple of days(...

\* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD( and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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## Read, Reread, and Reread it Again and Again

by Rabbi Yoscher Katz \*

We live in NYC, but my wife and I and our two boys spend summers in Israel. We have been doing this for fourteen years. Each time, on our way to Israel, we stop over in a different European country for about seven to ten days for a short family vacation.

About ten years ago we chose Berlin as our vacation destination. Our boys were four and six years old at the time. While the four-year-old was too young to appreciate the historical gravitas of this particular destination, the six-year-old was starting to grasp the significance of the experience.

Of all the sites we visited, for some reason, the remnants of the Berlin Wall made the biggest impression on him. He was extremely curious about the story of the wall and its subsequent demolition. He inquired about it, and we shared with him an age-appropriate version of its history.

After a few days it became clear to us that he was deeply impacted by the story and he kept asking us to repeat it. We of course obliged, repeating the tale again and again, keeping the basics of the event intact but adding something unique each time: a new detail, a different angle, or perhaps a bit more color. By the time we left Berlin, we must have repeated the story to him about thirty times.

Around this time of year, I am always reminded of this experience.

As we are embarking on a new cycle of Torah-reading it is hard to avoid a sense of deja vu: again we are going to read the stories told in the book of Genesis, Numbers, etc? Don't we know them already?! Did we not hear them last year, the year before that, and the year before that?!

Well, that is not what our son taught us. He believed that one can listen to the same story multiple times and still find each reiteration vivifying and informative.

If that is true for stories in general, it is all the more so for the Torah, which we reread every year.

Mattan Torah, the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov claim, was not a one-time occurrence but instead happens anew every time we read from the Torah. Kri'at HaTorah encapsulates a modicum of Mattan Torah. We consequently encounter a "new" Torah every year, week after week.

While the texts we were originally given at Har Sinai are eternal and always the same, our existential experience of what those words tell us is new every year. Certain aspects of the Torah's narrative and laws deeply resonated last year but could perhaps lose their resonance this coming year, and vice versa.

As Maimonides explains (see his Mishnah commentary at the end of Tractate Makkot), the vastness of the Torah was by divine design, precisely for this reason. The enormity is there so that it offers something for everybody. It is unlikely that all of Torah would resonate with us all the time. But with such abundance, we can always choose to focus on those aspects that enhance our religious journey.

This Shabbat, therefore, when the Torah reader calls out the opening verses of Parshat Breishit, allow yourself to encounter our covenantal text anew, to experience a personal Mattan Torah (see *Zohar Shemot* p. 106a). Perhaps you will discover something that was not there — for you — last year.

Allowing yourself to experience those tales anew, as if you never heard them before, could possibly reveal to you **נַחַת תורה**, the aspect of Torah that is uniquely and exclusively yours. And if you do not open yourself in this way, it perhaps will never come to light, depriving you of some aspects of Torah and also making the Torah incomplete and (metaphysically) *pasul*. A Torah that is incomplete is invalid, even if only a single letter is missing. You might be in possession of that single — so far missing — letter (metaphorically speaking).

For myself, I can't wait to hear the current version of these majestic stories. Looking at them through the prism of the annual new lenses we bring to this encounter I will wonder: What is the story of creation? How does my perception of its particulars differ from the way I perceived them last year? What happened to Noach and his family when the world was wiped out by an unnatural occurrence? What were our patriarchs and matriarchs like? How did they grapple when tragedy struck (starvation, infertility, spousal and familial strife)? What can we learn from that? Can we infer from those experiences some guidance for our current situation?

Similarly, in what way will the legal edicts of the Torah be similar to last year's and in what way will they be different, conceived differently by the new us that has so drastically changed since the last time we read them.

I am really curious.

\* Rabbi, Prospect Heights Shul, Brooklyn, New York. Ordination from Rabbi Yechezkel Roth, dayan of UTA Satmer.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/10/breishit5784/>

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### **Shavuon Noach**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

As I write, it's hard not to be absorbed in media reports of some kind, every few minutes. To regularly click 'refresh' on Google's Israel update. One news outlet gets it right and we celebrate, only to see another that stirs us up all over again. Most of us are asking ourselves -- is there something tangible and positive we can do for Israel? Something to break us out of the news feed? The answer is definitely "yes." In fact, tremendously, we've already started.

If I may use a metaphor from Noach, this week's parasha, we have been flooded with fear, media, war, anger and all kinds of heavy and frantic cries. But it gives me real hope that I have seen more and more Jews hold on to their Ark i.e. their Jewish connection and capacity to comfort their brothers and sisters, pray for them in public, send them money, stand for them at public vigils around the globe and secure our own communities and loved ones.

The flood is still happening, and it's not over. It may not even be over for some time ahead. But if we hold on to our Ark and envision the doves at the end, we can make our way through the storm. We've done it before.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(.

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## Rav Kook Torah Psalm 9: Nations Who Forget God

]Ed.: This week I selected a writing on evil from Rav Kook – a message that he could have applied to Hamas.[

The Sages expressed mixed feelings towards the ancient Persians. Rabban Gamliel lauded them for their modesty and refined manners, while Rav Yoseph was far less complimentary, branding them as a nation “*consecrated and destined for Gehinnom.*” Why such harsh words for a people renowned for their refinement and culture?

### **Destined for Gehinnom**

When we observe a primitive people who rob and plunder, we attribute their actions to their savage and uncultured nature. However, when dealing with a civilized nation, we expect them to recognize the value of just and equitable dealings. When a highly-developed society is gripped by a belligerent spirit of conquest and oppression, like the ancient Persians who subjugated the Jewish communities under their control, then they are destined to be judged harshly by the Eternal Judge.

The expression “*consecrated and destined for Gehinnom*” indicates that this judgment is not due to a primitive nature, but rather the result of a willful choice. The cultured Persians should have chosen the path of goodness, but instead opted for the path of violence and subjugation.

### **Forgetting God**

This idea may also be heard in King David’s call for God’s justice against evil nations:

“*The Eternal has made Himself known, executing judgment... The wicked will return to the grave, all the nations who forget God.*” )Psalms 9:17-18(

This depiction of “nations who forget God” indicates that in fact these nations should remember God. They possess the potential and sophistication to know God and emulate His ways of kindness and justice. But instead, they chose to pursue a path of moral treachery, so they are called “*nations who forget God.*”

)Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I on Berachot 8b )1:111(.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/PSALM-9.htm>

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## **Individual and Collective Responsibility )5772, 5777(** By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

I once had the opportunity to ask the Catholic writer Paul Johnson what had struck him most about Judaism during the long period he spent researching it for his masterly A History of the Jews? He replied in roughly these words:

“*There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasised the individual – like the secular West today. And there have been others that placed weight on the collective – communist Russia or China, for example.*”

*Judaism, he continued, was the most successful example he knew of that managed the delicate*

*balance between both – giving equal weight to individual and collective responsibility. Judaism was a religion of strong individuals and strong communities. This, he said, was very rare and difficult, and constituted one of our greatest achievements.*

It was a wise and subtle observation. Without knowing it, he had in effect paraphrased Hillel's aphorism: "*If I am not for myself, who will be )individual responsibility? But if I am only for myself, what am I )collective responsibility?*" This insight allows us to see the argument of Parshat Noach in a way that might not have been obvious otherwise.

The parsha begins and ends with two great events, the Flood on the one hand; Babel and its tower on the other. On the face of it they have nothing in common. The failings of the generation of the Flood are explicit. "*The world was corrupt before God, and the land was filled with violence. God saw the world, and it was corrupted. All flesh had perverted its way on the earth*" )Gen. 6:11-12(. Wickedness, violence, corruption, perversion: this is the language of systemic moral failure.

Babel by contrast seems almost idyllic. "*The entire earth had one language and a common speech*" )11:1(. The builders are bent on construction, not destruction. It is far from clear what their sin was. Yet from the Torah's point of view, Babel represents another serious wrong turn, because immediately thereafter God summons Abraham to begin an entirely new chapter in the religious story of humankind. There is no Flood – God had, in any case, sworn that He would never again punish humanity in such a way )"*Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have just done.*" 8:21(. But it is clear that after Babel, God comes to the conclusion that there must be another and different way for humans to live.

Both the Flood and the Tower of Babel are rooted in actual historical events, even if the narrative is not couched in the language of descriptive history. Mesopotamia had many flood myths, all of which testify to the memory of disastrous inundations, especially on the flat lands of the Tigris-Euphrates valley )See Commentary of R. David Zvi Hoffman to Genesis 6 ]Hebrew, 140[, who suggests that the Flood may have been limited to centres of human habitation, rather than covering the whole earth(. Excavations at Shuruppak, Kish, Uruk and Ur – Abraham's birthplace – reveal evidence of clay flood deposits. Likewise the Tower of Babel was a historical reality. Herodotus tells of the sacred enclosure of Babylon, at the centre of which was a ziggurat or tower of seven stories, 300 feet high. The remains of more than thirty such towers have been discovered, mainly in lower Mesopotamia, and many references have been found in the literature of the time that speak of such towers "reaching heaven."

However, the stories of the Flood and Babel are not merely historical, because the Torah is not history but "*teaching, instruction.*" They are there because they represent a profound moral-social-political-spiritual truth about the human situation as the Torah sees it. They represent, respectively, precisely the failures intimated by Paul Johnson. The Flood tells us what happens to civilisation when individuals rule and there is no collective. Babel tells us what happens when the collective rules and individuals are sacrificed to it.

It was Thomas Hobbes )1588-1679(, the thinker who laid the foundations of modern politics in his classic *Leviathan* )1651(, who – without referring to the Flood – gave it its best interpretation. Before there were political institutions, said Hobbes, human beings were in a "*state of nature.*" They were individuals, packs, bands. Lacking a stable ruler, an effective government and enforceable laws, people would be in a state of permanent and violent chaos – "*a war of every man against every man*" – as they competed for scarce resources. There would be "*continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*" Such situations exist today in a whole series of failed or failing states. That is precisely the Torah's description of life before the Flood. When there is no rule of law to constrain individuals, the world is filled with violence.

Babel is the opposite, and we now have important historical evidence as to exactly what was meant by the sentence, "*The entire land had one language and a common speech.*" This may not refer to primal humanity before the division of languages. In fact in the previous chapter the Torah has already stated, "*From these the maritime peoples spread out into their lands in their clans within their nations, each with its own language*" )Gen. 10:5. The Talmud Yerushalmi, Megillah 1:11, 71b, records a dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Johanan, one of whom holds that the division of humanity into seventy languages occurred before the Flood(.

The reference seems to be to the imperial practice of the neo-Assyrians, of imposing their own language on the peoples they conquered. One inscription of the time records that Ashurbanipal II “*made the totality of all peoples speak one speech.*” A cylinder inscription of Sargon II says, “*Populations of the four quarters of the world with strange tongues and incompatible speech . . . whom I had taken as booty at the command of Ashur my lord by the might of my sceptre, I caused to accept a single voice.*” The neo-Assyrians asserted their supremacy by insisting that their language was the only one to be used by the nations and populations they had defeated. On this reading, Babel is a critique of imperialism.

There is even a hint of this in the parallelism of language between the builders of Babel and the Egyptian Pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites. In Babel they said, “*Come, Jhava[ let us build ourselves a city and a tower . . . lest Jpen[ we be scattered over the face of the earth ]*” Gen. 11:4(. In Egypt Pharaoh said, “*Come, Jhava[ let us deal wisely with them, lest Jpen[ they increase so much . . . ]*” Ex. 1:10(. The repeated “*Come, let us . . . lest*” is too pronounced to be accidental. Babel, like Egypt, represents an empire that subjugates entire populations, riding roughshod over their identities and freedoms.

If this is so, we will have to re-read the entire Babel story in a way that makes it much more convincing. The sequence is this: Genesis 10 describes the division of humanity into seventy nations and seventy languages. Genesis 11 tells of how one imperial power conquered smaller nations and imposed its language and culture on them, thus directly contravening God’s wish that humans should respect the integrity of each nation and each individual. When at the end of the Babel story God “*confuses the language*” of the builders, He is not creating a new state of affairs but restoring the old.

Interpreted thus, the story of Babel is a critique of the power of the collective when it crushes individuality – the individuality of the seventy cultures described in Genesis 10. )A personal note: I had the privilege of addressing 2,000 leaders from all the world’s faiths at the Millennium Peace Summit in the United Nations in August 2000. It turned out that there were exactly 70 traditions – each with their subdivisions and sects – represented. So it seems there still are seventy basic cultures(. When the rule of law is used to suppress individuals and their distinctive languages and traditions, this too is wrong. The miracle of monotheism is that Unity in Heaven creates diversity on earth, and God asks us )with obvious conditions( to respect that diversity.

So the Flood and the Tower of Babel, though polar opposites, are linked, and the entire parsha of Noach is a brilliant study in the human condition. There are individualistic cultures and there are collectivist ones, and both fail, the former because they lead to anarchy and violence, the latter because they lead to oppression and tyranny.

So Paul Johnson’s insight turns out to be both deep and true. After the two great failures of the Flood and Babel, Abraham was called on to create a new form of social order that would give equal honour to the individual and the collective, personal responsibility and the common good. That remains the special gift of Jews and Judaism to the world.

]Note: Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah.[

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/individual-and-collective-responsibility/>

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## Noah the Pessimist

By Yossy Goldman\* © Chabad 2023

Who was the greatest financial genius in history?! The hero of this week’s parshah, old Noah himself. That’s right. He floated a company when the whole world was in liquidation!

There’s much discussion about Noah in the commentaries. The Torah states explicitly that he was a tzaddik, a noble distinction not attributed to many others. And yet, the Talmudic sages debate the extent of his righteousness. Was it objective or subjective? Absolute or relative? Was he only a tzaddik compared to his corrupt generation, or would he have

measured up to the Biblical giants like Abraham and Moses?

And then, when the Flood begins and Noah and his family enter the Ark, the Torah says they went *in “because of the flood waters.”* This can be understood simply, or, as Rashi interprets, that Noah was a man of “*small faith.*” He struggled with his belief; he wasn’t entirely convinced that there would really be a flood at all. It was only when the water started coming down in torrents that he was forced to concede and enter the Ark.

In the haftarah, the prophet Isaiah describes the Flood as “*the waters of Noah.*” The Sages explain that although he was the most righteous man of his generation, Noah bore some responsibility for the Flood. Why? Because he could have done more to persuade his contemporaries to repent and to give up their evil ways of immorality, robbery, and corruption. Noah wasn’t into outreach. He just stood there building his Ark and answered questions he was asked directly, but he didn’t really go out of his way to try and change the mindset of the people around him. Had he done so, he might well have changed the situation and saved the world.

So how do we reconcile the Torah itself describing Noah as a tzaddik, a righteous man, and the Biblical commentaries telling us that Noah was, in fact, lacking in faith? Moreover, G d spoke to Noah directly, which makes it even harder to understand!

Perhaps rather than lacking faith in G d, Noah lacked faith in humanity. Would anybody really listen to him if he did go out and try to persuade them? A leopard never changes his spots. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. People don’t change. There’s no hope. It’s a waste of time. Why bother?

Like the story of the two old Jews who would meet and sit on the park bench every afternoon. And they would usually argue. About what? About everything. About the state of the world, about Israel, about politics. You know, the usual.

One fellow is the eternal optimist, and the other always the pessimist.

One day the pessimist looks at the optimist and says to him, “If you’re such an optimist, how come you look so anxious today?”

His friend answers, “*You think it’s easy to be an optimist these days?!*”

Noah was a pessimist. He saw the world was in such a mess, there was just no hope and no point in even trying. He had no faith in humanity.

But there’s also a third interpretation of Noah’s lack of faith.

It wasn’t that he lacked faith in G d, or in humanity, but according to Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, Noah lacked faith in himself!

He lacked the confidence in his own capacity to make a difference, to influence, inspire, and be an engine of change.

Noah thought too little of himself. He lacked self-confidence and faith in his own abilities.

In one of his first speeches at our shul, the late Chief Rabbi Harris told a story about when he was a Jewish prison chaplain in London.

One day he received an emergency call from the chief warden of the prison. A Jewish prisoner was being released that day. He had served his time and was being set free, but there was one problem: he didn’t want to leave! “He doesn’t want to go! Rabbi, please come down and talk to this guy!”

So Rabbi Harris went to the prison and met the fellow, and asked him, “I don’t understand. Don’t you want to be free?!”

And the man answered, “Rabbi, I know what’s going to happen. I’ll be OK for a while, and then I’ll relapse and do it again, and they’ll put me right back. I may as well just stay right here.”

How sad.

If we don’t have self-belief, we will never achieve anything meaningful in life.

Please G d, we will all learn from Noah. To believe in G d, to believe in humanity, and perhaps most important to our success in life, to believe in ourselves.

\* Founding director of the first Chabad House in South Africa (1976). Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul and President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5673628/jewish/Noah-the-Pessimist.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5673628/jewish/Noah-the-Pessimist.htm)

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### **Noach: The Purpose of Civilization**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

Instead of obeying G d’s command to disperse and populate the world, the survivors of the Flood congregated under the leadership of Ham’s great-grandson Nimrod.

Nimrod convinced them that in order to prevent another Flood, they should build an enormous tower so they could take measures to control the rainfall, if necessary.

In order to teach them that unity serves no purpose if it leads to rebellion against Him, G d made each clan suddenly speak its own language; thus humanity dispersed from the Tower of Babel, in accordance with G d’s original intentions.

### **The Purpose of Civilization**

*They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower.” (Genesis 11:4)*

The survivors of the Flood overlooked the Flood’s lesson that we should look to G d as the source of our well-being.

We, the survivors of a “flood” that killed 6,000,000 Jews, should learn from the mistake of the survivors of Noah’s Flood. Rebuilding the infrastructure of Jewish civilization is praiseworthy and noble, but it is not an end in itself.

Our “city and tower” must possess a deeper, spiritual purpose, which means that our houses of prayer and Torah study should be the most prominent and cherished buildings in our cities.

Similarly, our careers, homes, lives, and families should express our desire to fulfill G d’s will rather than just empty self-pride. Their Jewish trappings – mezuzot, tefilin, Shabbat candles, etc. – should be of the highest ritual quality; our collection of Torah books should be well-stocked, prominently displayed, and well-read; the music and conversation heard within our homes should befit a Jewish home; and so on.

— from *Daily Wisdom 1*

With wishes for a swift and complete victory over our enemies,  
Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

**Chapters of psalms to recite daily – to download:**

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AKMWqg80kU-LZSgctgRwuPHhxuo>

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

## Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

In memory of Arnold Gimpel, a”h, (Aharon Leib ben Mordechai) by his children & grandchildren and in memory of the many Jews who have been murdered in Israel or died fighting for Israel since Simchat Torah. We also dedicate this issue to the wounded and missing. May the wounded fully recover and may the missing be restored to their families. We pay tribute to Klal Yisrael and the citizens of Israel. Am Yisrael Chai!!

Volume 30, Issue 2

Shabbat Parashat Noach

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### Covenant and Conversation

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l**

#### The Courage to Live with Uncertainty

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, zt”l.

He was 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 most 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 Tanchuma, 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

"All Israel are bound to each other", all the more so, when all the inhabitants of the land are in great trouble. It is a duty to arouse oneself to the right emotion, to share in the public's sorrow, and to pray to God from the bottom of the heart and with tears, that He will stand with our soldiers, and return all the captives to their homes in peace. May all our enemies fall. May God hear our prayers and have mercy on his people. May we soon have complete redemption in our day.  
*Halacha Yomit*, Ovadiah Yosef Institute

leave without permission?" The Holy One blessed be He said, to him: "Are you looking for permission? In that case I give you permission." 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, as early as 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.

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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 Jews. Some Zionists were religious, others were secular, but most importantly they all knew what the Midrash Tanchuma 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.

[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.

### The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

#### Judging Noah Fairly

Lately, I've been reflecting on the early origins of my basic beliefs. One of those beliefs, which has thankfully persisted to this day, has been the belief in fairness. I guess that I first learned about fairness on the playgrounds of the neighborhood in Brooklyn, where I grew up.

Our mentors on those playing fields, where we became adept at punchball, and later at softball and basketball, were not professional adult coaches. Rather, they were other boys, barely a year or two older than us. But fair play, and consideration for those of us with lesser athletic skills, were among the lessons they taught and the lessons that we internalized.

Of course, I later learned that those lessons were among the ancient teachings of the Jewish tradition. "Don't judge your fellow until you have been in his environment."

"Appreciate the leaders of your own era, even if they don't quite compare with the leaders of old." "Judge each person favorably, according to his own merits."

But while I was imbibing those lessons on the playground, I was introduced to the study of Chumash and Rashi in the classroom. It was then that I was introduced to Noah, the central figure of this week's Torah portion, Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32). Here was a man "who found favor in the eyes of the Lord," and who was not only a tzaddik, a righteous man, but a tzaddik tamim, a perfectly righteous man.

I vividly remember asking my grandfather, who had one of the few sukkot in the neighborhood back then, if we could hang a picture of Noah on the wall of the sukkah along with the other biblical heroes whose portraits bedecked the walls of the sukkah of which he was so proud.

I was taken aback by his retort: "Have you not learned in school that Noah was not as great as Abraham, and that had he lived in Abraham's time, he would be a 'nobody'?" I had to confess that we had not yet learned Rashi's commentary, and certainly not the many other rabbinic sources, that insist that Noah fell short of the requirements necessary for us to adulterate him, and therefore we could not invite him into our sukkah as we did with other biblical heroes from Abraham on.

Much later in life, in fact very recently, I came across what might be the harshest critique of Noah in all of rabbinic literature. It is a passage in the Holy Zohar, which contrasts Noah with Abraham. This supremely mystical work condemns Noah. The Lord informed Noah that He found mankind to be so degenerate that He had decided to wipe out all living beings and spare only Noah and his family. What was Noah reaction? Did he protest? No! He was silent. He said nothing.

But ten generations later, when the Lord informed Abraham that he was about to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wicked ways, Abraham protested to the Almighty. He challenged Him to live up to His divine principles of fairness and justice, and not punish the few exceptional individuals who were morally upstanding. Noah was silent and is therefore castigated. Abraham voiced his protest and is therefore admired.

The Zohar takes the matter even further and finds Abraham himself inferior to Moses. After all, Abraham only asked for the righteous to be spared, whereas Moses asked that the Lord even spare sinners. Moses was sufficiently stalwart to demand that the Lord either forgive all of the Israelites, including the

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sinners, or else "wipe me out from the Book which You have written." Moses was willing to give up everything rather than see anyone punished.

To this day, I ask myself the question, as numerous students of Torah have asked before me, "Are we judging Noah fairly?"

I try to empathize with Noah. I ask myself, perhaps he was a meek and humble person, who felt inadequate to stand up to others and rebuke them for their iniquities? Perhaps he was reluctant to debate those around him because he might be persuaded that their immorality was good and proper, and his morality naïve and foolish? Or perhaps he felt that his generation was so decadent that preaching to them would be a futile undertaking, that they were beyond hope of rehabilitation?

Very recently, I came across a book from which I derived an approach to understanding Noah and justifying his relative failures. It is a book by a contemporary rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, entitled HaMakor HaKaful (The Double Source). Rabbi Bin-Nun offers an approach to understanding the psyche of the great Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, whose leadership as Chief Rabbi and vast and brilliant oeuvre of writings continue to inspire us to this day.

Rabbi Bin-Nun maintains that all great leaders draw from two distinct sources. He calls them samchut and hashraah, which I suggest can be translated as "a sense of one's own authority" and "spiritual inspiration." The former originates within the person, from the depths of his or her own psyche. The latter comes from an external source, from the Almighty. As I understand it, the former often takes the form of a felt mission, a purpose in life, an inner drive to accomplish a specific set of goals. The latter is a calling from Above, a Holy Spirit, a prophetic calling.

Rabbi Bin-Nun suggests that Rav Kook drew from both sources. He felt an internal impetus to lead, to return to the Land of Israel from his native Latvia, to envision the pioneers of early immigration to Israel as the vanguard of the ultimate redemption. But he also heard a voice from a second source, an external sublime source, a prophetic inspiration.

I suggest that Rabbi Bin-Nun's concept of samchut can be used to differentiate between the inactivity of Noah, the partial response of Abraham, and the total sense of responsibility for the other as exemplified by Moses.

What was Noah's sense of mission? He really had only one mission—to construct the ark. Once he had done that, and successfully

steered the ark through months of troubled waters, he had no coherent sense of mission. All he could do was plant a vineyard, with inevitable consequences.

His feeble sense of mission limited him, and thus he could not stand up in protest of the Lord's Decree. He could not become a leader of men.

Abraham, on the other hand, had a clear sense of mission. The Lord Himself declared, "For I know him, that he will direct his descendants to do righteousness and justice." Justice was his mission, and so he could stand up to the Almighty and insist upon justice.

Moses had an entirely different understanding of his mission. He was to lead the Jewish people, saints and sinners alike, into the Land of Israel. That mission enabled him to fearlessly confront the Almighty and demand that He totally forgive His people.

The lesson for all of us is that we have a mission to perform in life. It is not a simple matter to determine what that mission is. But once we achieve even a tentative sense of mission and purpose, we gain a measure of confidence and authority which equip us with capacities and capabilities beyond our expectations.

Noah was not morally defective. He was indeed a tzaddik tamim. However, he lacked a sense of mission and purpose, and that constrained him tragically.

We are all descendants of Abraham and disciples of Moses and are thereby blessed with a variety of missions which we must recognize, and which must motivate us to undreamed of accomplishments.

#### Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

#### **The Generation of the Tower and a Towering Generation**

In this sidra we read of the generation of Noah and the evil lives they led. Their punishment, as it is recorded in the Torah, was complete destruction – except for Noah and his family – in the great flood. Following that episode, we read of another generation following in the footsteps of the first. This is Dor haHaflaga – the Generation of the Tower. The people of this generation had evidently failed to learn from the tragic lesson that its predecessors had been taught. They were a people marked by arrogance and haughtiness.

The Torah does not describe merely poetic myths. We have substantial corroboration of that episode from the science of archeology. We know that the Mesopotamians of about 3,600–3,800 years ago began to dwell in big

cities, and to build tremendous pagan temples in them. These temples were constructed as high towers as a sign of the equality of the builders with the pagan gods they worshiped. In their writings, some of which we still have, they boast of building into the heavens, even as is recorded in the sidra. At the turn of the present century, the very tower of which the Bible speaks was discovered, in ruins, by a German archeological expedition. It was clearly an impressive and imposing structure. These tremendous towers expressed the desire of the Babylonians to imagine themselves a superior race, a "herrenvolk." Ultimately, the cities and the towers were destroyed, and all further construction was frustrated.

If you will reread the story of the tower, you will observe the terrific sarcasm with which the Torah describes the entire episode. Just one example: the name Bavel (or Babel or Babylon) given to that place by God. This is a sarcastic pun, as the Mesopotamians themselves called their city Babel because in their language the name was derived from the words bab-ili, meaning the Gate of the God – or in the plural, bab-ilani, the Gate of the Gods (hence: Babylon). However, in Hebrew the name bavel is similar to the root b-l-l which means: confusion. So the Torah tells us that what these mortals thought was the gate to their own divinity was nothing more than the confusion of their poor minds.

And yet, despite the sarcasm, bitterness, and ridicule which the Torah heaps upon the generation of the tower, the indictment of this generation is not complete. Just compare these two generations, that of the flood and that of the tower: the generation of the flood was, with the exception of Noah and his family, completely and utterly destroyed; the generation of the tower was not destroyed at all – it was merely punished by internal dissension and great exile and dispersion. Why is it that the generation of the tower was treated with such comparative leniency despite their sins of arrogance?

Our rabbis (Genesis Rabba 38:6) gave us the answer, based upon a clue in the Bible itself. Our Torah mentions that the whole world spoke one language, meaning of course that there was unity, cooperation, friendship. And therefore, "The generation of the flood, since they were steeped in theft, lo nishtayra mehem peleita – none of them remained. But the generation of the tower, since they loved each other, there remained from them a remnant."

There is something that can be salvaged from the generation of the tower, something of lasting and permanent value, and that is: love, friendship. What our rabbis got from this episode of the generation of the tower was that every generation can become a towering

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generation if it learns to love; that even if people are arrogant and Godless and criminal, they can escape heavenly wrath if they will learn to love God's creatures. The only way of nishtayra mehem peleita, of surviving a world of coldness and treachery and mass-production and bold projects which obscure the individual, is through love.

It is told that a Jew once asked his rabbi, "Why do we say "lehayim" to our friends before reciting the blessing over wine or schnapps? Isn't it disrespectful to bless our neighbor before we bless God? The rabbi answered that the practice is valid since the Torah commands us to accept the mitzva of "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) before it tells us, "Love the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

We frequently speak of the mitzva of neighborly love, and yet we usually fail to understand it – and therefore to practice it. The difficulty is a simple one: some people are simply unlovable. You ask me to have real affection for so-and-so? How can I, when I think he is repulsive? Or, how can I when I simply don't approve of him and what he thinks and what he does? I am critical of so many things about him, and I refuse to surrender the right to be critical of him; it is part of a man's rational makeup to be critical. And if I don't approve of him and have no emotional ties to him, how can I possibly observe the commandment to love him?

That is a good question, which you have no doubt thought of, and which we must be able to answer if we will ever succeed in making of ourselves, who have so many of the faults and evil traits of the generation of the tower, a towering generation – if we are to manage to survive as decent human beings and good Jews.

A most profound and adequate answer is the one suggested by that great German Jew, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Hirsch makes the observation that regarding the verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself," the Torah does not say "Ve'ahavta et reiakha," but "lereiakha," which is difficult to translate. But what does that actually mean? "Et reiakha" implies an emotional tie, a complete and uncritical love of your neighbor, which may be very good but is not usually possible. But "lereiakha" carries with it the meaning that you don't have to

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approve of him or anything he says or wants, but what is required is empathy, meaning: put yourself in his place, so that you will participate in his feelings, in whatever happens to him – that is lereiakha; share in what happens to him. If great good fortune happens to him – be happy for him, as if it happened to you. Don't begrudge it and don't be indifferent. If tragedy occurs to him – share his sorrow and feel it as if it happened to you “–kamokha.” And when you can establish that identification and deeply participate in both his joys and his sorrows, then you will certainly be moved to increase the joys and alleviate the sorrows. You need agree to nothing he says and may even consider his personality faulty – but he is a human being with feelings and sensitivities, and the mitzva of neighborly love requires you to consider those feelings as if they were your own. The Torah asks nothing of us that is beyond our capabilities. It does not ask of us to be uncritical in accepting confidants or friends. It does not ask of us that we gush in sweetness over someone we loathe. It does say that no matter what our opinion of a person, we must have enough love in our souls that we feel not only for him – not only sympathy; but as if we were him – empathy.

This demand of the Torah that we practice neighborly love is not a demand to be an angel. It is a challenge to be human. Few of us find it possible to approve of any one person completely and uncritically. Few of us can form deep emotional attachments with everyone we know. But all of us were created in the image of God. And that means that we can practice neighborly love “lereiakha”; we can learn empathy, we can consider another's feelings as if they were our very own. For that is the meaning of the Torah's commandment – it is practicable, manly, and supremely human.

It is that and that alone which can make us the peleita, the survivors in this generation, which like the one mentioned in this sidra, is feverishly busy in building all kinds of structures and weapons and industries, and deriving therefrom the collective arrogance that makes us think we are supermen. The generation of the tower was a wicked one and therefore doomed to failure. But their one redeeming feature, love, is that which is able to make of us and every other generation a towering generation. May that be God's will. *Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages — Genesis, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern*

#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **The Connection Between Noach and Metzorah**

The pasuk in Parshas Noach says: “Make for yourself a Teiva (Ark) of Gofer wood, with Kinim (compartments)...” (Bereshis 6:14).

The Medrash in Bereshis Rabbah (Chapter 31) connects the word Kinim in this pasuk with the term Kinim (pair of birds) used in the purification ritual of a Metzorah. The Medrash states: “Just like this Kain (bird pair) purifies the Metzorah, so too your Teiva will purify you.”

Kinim is not a very common word for compartments or rooms, but that is the word that the pasuk uses here in Parshas Noach. The Medrash zeros in on this peculiar usage of the word to connect the Kinim in the Teiva to birds 'nests, which are also called Kinim.

This Medrash is fertile ground for exposition. Somehow there is a connection between Noach and Metzorah. What on earth does Noach have to do with a leper? That is problem number one.

Problem number two is that the Medrash is implicitly saying that Noach required some kind of purification. There is a Medrash Tanchuma that is even more explicit about this. The Medrash comments on the pasuk “Leave the Teiva” (Bereshis 8:16) by stating that Noach hated being in the Teiva. He was constantly praying to the Almighty, “Get me out of here!”

It is hard for us to imagine what it was like for Noach to be locked up in the Teiva for a year. The Teiva was far from the Princess Cruise Line or any other luxury liner. The Teiva was a very crude building. Noach and his family had to share this crude building with every single type of animal and creature on the face of the earth. This was no picnic.

The Medrash notes that the Ribono shel Olam responded to Noach's constant pleas to be released from the Teiva: “This is a decree from before Me that you will not leave this enclosure until twelve months are complete.” In other words, “Sorry, Noach. This is a punishment. You need to be in this Teiva for an entire year.” If this seemed like a prison, it is because it was a prison. It was meant to be a prison. Noach needed to experience this purification process for twelve months until he was permitted to leave the Teiva.

Thus, Noach was not merely in the Teiva to escape from and survive the Flood. It was also a penance. He needed to pay a price. He needed to be there locked up with all these animals for twelve months. So we see clearly from this Medrash that Noach needed purification.

The question is, what did Noach do that caused him to need to experience this ordeal and to pay this price to achieve purification?

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Many commentaries—such as the Alshich, the Meshech Chochmah, and the Chasam Sofer—say the same thing. The aveira for which Noach had to do penance was that his righteousness was strictly between himself and the Almighty. He did not go out and seek to improve the state of the people around him, as Avraham later did.

There was a Heavenly claim against Noach because he did not save anyone else of his entire generation. He took care of himself and his family, but he let the rest of the world literally go down the tube. That is an indictment of Noach.

So now we understand the midah k'neged midah of why Noach had to sit in the Teivah for twelve months by himself: You sat alone in your own four amos (cubits) during your entire lifetime and did not go out and have a positive effect on other people. Your punishment is that you will in fact need to sit alone! This is the purification-punishment that Noach needed to endure.

And what is the connection between Metzorah and the Teivah? I saw a beautiful observation in the sefer Ateres Shalom. Just as the Kein (birds 'nest) purifies the Metzorah, so too the Kein (compartment) will purify Noach. Chazal say that a person gets Tzaraas because of Lashon HaRah. The Zohar famously says there are two types of sinful speech: Evil speech, and failure to use Good speech.

If someone can give a complement but instead keeps quiet, that is also an aveira involving speech. The 'Gift of Speech' can be used to defame, but it can also be used to encourage. It can be used to give people mussar and to straighten people out. In fact, the Zohar writes that just as people are punished for Evil speech, so too people are punished for keeping quiet and not taking advantage of the opportunity to use Good speech. Certainly, if people are on an improper path and someone has the opportunity to speak to them and correct them but keeps quiet, that too is an aveira.

This is the connection between Metzorah and Noach. Noach did not speak when he was supposed to speak. Just like a Metzorah may be punished for NOT speaking Good Speech, so too, that was Noach's aveira as well.

#### **Sometimes Only Hashem Realizes...**

The pasuk says “And Elokim saw the earth and it was corrupt for all flesh corrupted its way on the earth.” (Bereshis 6:12). Rav Chatzkel Abramsky asks a question: Why was it only “And Elokim saw that the earth was decadent”? The pasuk seems to imply that only the Ribono shel Olam saw that things were bad. What about all of society?

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky explained that sometimes when society begins to decline, the society does not realize how far they have drifted. We need the Ribono shel Olam to say, "My gosh! Look at what has happened."

Before the Mabul, things had become so corrupt and people had become so accustomed to the corruption and the decadence and the depravity that He was the only one to notice the problem. "And Elokim saw" but everyone else said, "This is just the way it is!"

### **Dvar Torah** **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

What is our most repetitive blessing?

Without doubt it's the bracha we recite over a rainbow. In Parshat Noach, the Torah tells us that immediately after the flood Hashem placed a rainbow in the sky to be an everlasting sign of the fact that never again would He bring about global destruction. Therefore when we see a rainbow, we recite this beautiful blessing and it brings us a lot of reassurance.

The wording is as follows:

Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu melech haolam – Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe  
zocher habit – who remembers the Covenant  
vene'emen bevruto – and Who is faithful to His Covenant  
vekayam bema'amaro – and who fulfills His word.

We can see three statements in this brief blessing, and they all seem to be saying the same thing.

The origin of the blessing is in the Gemara Masechet Brachot 59a. There the Gemara asks what is the blessing we recite over a rainbow. The answer given is that it's a blessing with the conclusion, "zocher habit" – "Hashem remembers His Covenant," and that's all.

Rabbi Yishmael however has a different tradition; that we conclude the bracha with the words, "vene'eman bevruto vekayam bema'amaro," – "Hashem is faithful to His covenant and He keeps His word."

When Rav Papa heard these two different traditions he struck a compromise formula. He brought both endings together to keep both traditions, and that's how our bracha came about, a bracha with these three statements in it.

When you come to think of it, they are not completely repetitive. First of all we say,

"zocher habit," – "Hashem remembers the Covenant." Remembering could mean recalling without necessarily doing anything about it, and that's why in addition we say, "vene'eman bevruto," – "He is faithful to His covenant," that is, He cares about it, He will recall it properly for the sake of the future, but even that isn't sufficient. We need the third statement, "vekayam bema'amaro" – "and who fulfills His word." Hashem will act on His word to guarantee in practice that He will deliver.

When it comes to our commitment to a Jewish way of life I believe that similarly, there are three levels. First of all we have "zocher habit" – it's so lovely and wonderful when Jewish people remember their Jewishness, their upbringing, their roots, their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. It is part of what they are about.

But in addition to that, we need a higher level as well – ne'eman bevruto, faithfulness to the covenant, support for Judaism. We need to be loyal to our synagogues and communities, to be there for the sake of our nation, to participate generously in charitable activities, to be one of those seeking to guarantee the continuity of our faith.

But even that is not the highest level we can reach. We need the third level as well: "vekayam bema'amaro" – kiyum hamitzvot, the fulfillment of the word of Hashem. This means being observant, to guarantee that on a practical level in our lives we are true to the word of the Almighty.

So therefore we find within this ever-so-repetitive blessing a key to guaranteeing the continuity of the Jewish nation.

### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

#### **Peace and Hope**

#### **Rabbi Ariel and Ruchama Yeshurun**

In this week's parasha Noah sends the dove to see if it would find dry land.

וישלה את היונה מאותו לוראות הקלו המים מעל פני כל ח: בראשית ח(הארץ)

The dove returns with an olive branch in its beak.

ותבאו אליו היונה לעת ערב והנה עלה זית טרף בפייה (א"י: בראשית ח)

The rabbis teach us that the dove is symbolic of peace and of hope.

The dove's return with an olive branch is to show that, even after the great deluge, even after the flood gates burst open blotting out and obliterating everything in their violent and deadly path, even after chaos, calamity and catastrophe, even after all seems to be lost and

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destroyed, life always finds a way! The tree of life will grow back! The flowers of paradise will bloom once more!

At the end, peace will always be victorious. The last stand will be that of hope and salvation. The final triumph will belong to the good people of the world.

Humanity has faced the crimes of war and genocide, the evils of tyranny and terror, bloodshed, persecution, exile, exploitation, discrimination, hatred and bigotry. Yet just like the dove, mankind has always returned from that battlefield with an olive branch, waving the flag of freedom and holding on to the inherent and self-evident truth of emancipation, equality, liberty and brotherhood. Redemption, rebirth and rebuilding – not revenge, retribution and retaliation.

Ultimately the power of the spirit conquers the strength of the spear.

The establishment of the State of Israel is a clear symbol of the ability of a people to resurrect themselves on their ancestral homeland after 2000 years of exile, Crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, antisemitic libels, and the great tragedy of Holocaust, the most comprehensive ethnic cleansing in world history.

Noah's dove will always return. The forces of light will always shine brighter. Hope will always win and peace and justice will always prevail.

### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

#### **Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

#### **No Such Thing as a Small Contribution**

It was a less than two weeks ago that Jewish communities outside of Israel read the book of Koheles. In 9:10, the wise King Solomon admonishes his listeners "כִּי אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יְדָךְ עַשְׂתָּה בְּכָחֵךְ עַשְׂתָּה-לְעַשְׂתָּה all that you're able to do with your might/abilities, do." I was privileged to hear from an adam gadol (who wishes to remain anonymous) a most powerful understanding of this verse.

In the Talmud there are three stories that portray making the most of one's potential. Firstly, we find (Kesubos 66b) that after the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash, Rav Yochanan ben Zakai was leaving Yerushalayim and saw a young woman gathering pieces of barley from the dung of the animals that belonged to Arabs. When she saw the great Rabbi, she covered her hair and stood before him and asked for his sustenance. He asked her "Who are you?" she responded, "The daughter of Nakdimon ben Gurion." He asked her "What happened to your father's extraordinary wealth?" and she answered that

unfortunately because he did not give charity, he lost his fortune. The Talmud then clarifies what she meant: we are taught that Nakdimon's daily practice, when he left his home to go to the study hall, was to have silk carpets laid out before him, and as he walked, the poor would gather up these expensive carpets and would sustain themselves with this most clever and extraordinary donation of charity. The Talmud says the he most certainly was philanthropic, however, what he was able to, and thus should have, done more, but unfortunately he did not; he failed to reach his potential.

In the second incident (Sanhedrin 68a), we are taught that when R' Eliezer was sick, Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues came to visit him. R' Eliezer asked them "Why have you come?" and they answered to learn Torah. Rebbe Eliezer said to them "I foresee unfortunately you will not leave this world with an easy comfortable passing." Rabbi Akiva then asked, "What will be my fate?" and R' Eliezer answered, "your passing will be much more tortuous than theirs". Rashi explains the harsh prediction of R' Eliezer in the following way: "because you, Rabbi Akiva, have an incredible mind for study, had you come and studied Torah from me you would have learned even more Torah than you have accumulated". Once again, the accusation is one of squandered potential - as much as Rabbi Akiva learned, and as great as he was, he could have done more.

The third story (Avodah Zarah 17b) relates that after R' Elazer ben Parta and R' Chananya ben Tradyon were arrested by the Romans, they had the following conversation. R' Elazer ben Parta said to R' Chananya ben Tradyon, "You are fortunate that you were only charged by the Romans for committing one offense while I was charged for committing five." R' Chanina responded, "How fortunate you are that despite the many charges, you will be saved, and woe unto me for having been charged with but one offense, and I will not be free, but suffer grave consequences. You will be freed because you have the merit for both studying and teaching Torah and at the same time the merit of gemilus chassadim, while I am charged with teaching and disseminating Torah, but I did not have the merit of gemilus chassadim to save me." The Talmud questions the statement of R' Chananya by reminding us that he served as the gabbai tzedaka, a trustworthy individual who discharged charity for the needy. The Talmud answers with the refrain used in the above two situations, i.e. yes he was involved with chessed, however he did not fulfill his potential and maximize his actions with accordance with his ability.

I'd like to offer a suggestion as to why the Talmud provides us with the insight and shortcomings of these three great individuals.

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch zt"l teaches that in many places the Torah teaches in the extreme. For example, the Torah does not legislate that if a Jew dies, that individual is to be buried, rather it teaches (Devarim 22:23) that if a Jew was unfortunately stoned by the Sanhedrin, the body was to be hung and the individual buried on that day. From here we learn that if the criminal is to be buried, most certainly each and every Jew is to be afforded this service. Similarly, when the Torah teaches (Shemos 23:4-5) that if one encounters the ox of their enemy or his donkey wandering, he shall surely return it to him and, furthermore, if he sees the animal or one that he hates crouching under its burden, and one's instinctive reaction would be to refrain from helping him, the Torah ordains that he must assist the one that he hates. The Torah once again teaches in the extreme that if this behavior is required towards an enemy, or the more so is one to be responsible to assist his fellow Jew. Why, one might ask, does the Torah teach to the extreme? Why not simply say that if one encounters the animal of his neighbor he should return it and assist the neighbor?

I believe that Ravina and Rav Ashi included these three narratives in the Talmud to teach us the lesson that if these three great individuals were taken to task from On High, even though they excelled in their respective ways, for not performing up to their full potential, each individual Jew will also be held accountable if they do not fulfill their potential. This is what King Solomon meant when he began the above cited verse, "All", not some of, or most of, one's potential, but all one's potential is to be actualized. Understandably, we are nowhere close to the level of the three great tzadikim mentioned above, but the lesson for all of us is we all can, and must, do more.

A further elaboration of this thesis is found in Chovos Halevavos (Shaar Chesbon Hanefesh, chapter 3), whereby Rabbeinu Bachya teaches that one is to examine his growth and the effort exerted in his religious and spiritual observance. He gives the following parable: a master gave his servant sufficient seeds to plant a sizable field, but the servant utilized only part of the seeds for the field while the rest of the seeds he used for his own personal field. When the master saw that his field was only partially sowed, he confronted his servant and told him he would be held accountable for failing to do what he could have and should have done and instead used/stole the seeds for his own personal use. Rabbeinu Bachya is teaching us that too often, we could use our energies towards greater spiritual accomplishment, serving Hashem and benefitting our fellow man with greater results. Unfortunately, we squander these talents and use them for our own personal gain.

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Finally, the Talmud (Berachos 32b) teaches that four areas of man's endeavors require strengthening: Torah study, the practice of good deeds, praying, and pursuing a livelihood. Rashi explains the term "strengthening" to mean to strengthen oneself constantly with all of their capabilities. We are to constantly strive to improve ourselves in these areas. Each one knows within the confines of his heart that there is always room for improvement.

There is a Jewish response to tragedy. The Torah (Bamidbar 10:9) teaches that, "When you go to war in your land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall call out in prayer, sound the trumpets, and you shall be recalled before Hashem your G-d. and you shall be saved from your foes." Interestingly, there is a difference of opinion between the Rambam and Ramban whether there is a biblical mitzvah to pray daily. The Rambam is of the opinion that there is a biblical mitzvah to pray daily (based on Devarim 10:20), while the Ramban believes (based upon the above cited verse) that only in times of crises there is a biblical mitzvah to pray.

The Rambam (Hilchos Ta'aniyos, 1:1-3) codifies the positive mitzvah to cry out at a time of crisis. Moreover, he teaches that this cry is one of the paths of repentance, and that one should realize that our actions and interactions have caused the tragedy. As Sefer Yonah proclaims (1:12), "For I know that it is because of me that this terrible storm is upon you." Each individual must feel that they have unfortunately contributed to this horrific occurrence. On the other hand, if one simply believes that antisemitism is purely happenstance, and not a direct "hit" from Above due to our actions, in the Rambam's words (ibid), "such belief causes man to remain attached to their evil ways." Rather (and I personally feel inadequate to give mussar to others), each individual has to carefully consider how he can improve in the areas of Torah, avodah and gemilus chassadim.

Torah: we don't realize sufficiently that when one is privileged to study Torah, whether in a group setting, with a chavrusa, or even alone, one is imbibing Godliness. The Zohar teaches that, "He, His Torah, and Israel are One." Therefore, an increase in one's Torah study brings more Godliness into this world. Our studying with greater effort will hopefully cause Him to temper the harsh decree upon our people and our land. The Talmud (Makos 10a) teaches that the success of our soldiers on the battlefield was contingent on the Torah learning in Yerushalayim. What emerges from above is that each individual's additional Torah learning will make a real difference.

Avodah: prayer is the second pillar upon which our nation stands. One dare not have the feeling that since they cannot do anything else, they might as well as say Tehilim. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Prayer and recitation of Tehilim helps significantly. This is derived from the Torah: the Jewish people were told (Bamidbar 31:2-6) to send a thousand soldiers from each tribe to go to war against Midyan, and the Talmud teaches that indeed each tribe conscripted three thousand soldiers, splitting their assignments as follows: one thousand to engage in battle, one thousand to assist the soldiers, and one thousand to pray. The Jew fights with prayer! Praying, as well as learning Torah, effects and changes the spiritual environment about us, and this change can effect a change in the Heavenly decree.

Gemilus chassadim: it is so sad that over the past several months we saw too many public demonstrations reflecting a lack of unity and a lack of respect for fellow Jews with different ideologies. One day of horror from the Amalek animals has completely changed the environment. To share just a few examples: a Rabbi in Eretz Yisroel saw an announcement asking for people to host families from the South. He called forty-five minutes later and was told, you are way too late, we already found everyone a place. He asked how many families needed to be housed? The voice at the other end responded, about 6,000. They found homes for 6,000 families in forty-five minutes! Secondly, many restaurants in Tel Aviv wanted to help the war effort by sending food to the soldiers. They were rejected because their facilities were not kosher. They immediately called the Rabbinate and kashered their restaurants. One more example out of literally thousands: on the second night of the war, ten o'clock at night, a father saw his seventeen-year-old daughter dressed up and about to leave the home. He asked where she was going. She answered, "there's a wedding with very few women and girls to dance with the kalah. I am going to dance." U-mi k'amcha Yisroel!

We, too, have to implement the third pillar. I, unfortunately, know personally of families where one member of the family doesn't speak to others. Families where parents and siblings don't communicate. Even if you believe you are right but know the other side is hurting, repair the damage. Be big. Take the initiative and reach out to that individual that you have not spoken to in years. Learn from our dear soldiers who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice and extend the painful effort to repair the breakdown of ahavas Yisroel. Ahavas Yisroel is not only to respect and love your peers and those with whom you associate. When someone cried to a wise Rav that their relative has a tattoo, his response was, that is

an issue between them and G-d; your job, however, is to love them since they are a Jew.

None of us come near the level of Nakdimon ben Gurion, R' Akiva, or R' Chananya ben Tradyon, but all of us can learn to implement the teaching of Shlomo HaMelech: "All that is in your power to do, do. Finally, in our Mussaf on Rosh Hashannah we acknowledge that Hashem inspects ma'aseh ish up'e'kudas - the actions of man and the fulfillment of his earthly mission. Everyone is given a personalized tafkid - a purpose and mission to fulfill in this world. Our trying and doing just a little bit more: Torah study, taking prayers seriously by taking upon ourselves not to talk during davening, or to undertake to know the meaning of the prayers, and to truly demonstrate ahavas Yisroel by feeling and repairing the pain of another Jew, will help facilitate in no small way a better outcome in this horrific war.

### Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

#### Drinking: Spiritual or Vulgar?

Wine and drinking first appear in the Torah in parshas Noach. Throughout the Torah, wine is referred to very ambiguously. Sometimes it is treated as the most heavenly of all elixirs, and sometimes it seems as if it is the most poisonous of all potions. On the one hand, we know that wine is brought together with sacrifices, and that shira - song is recited only over wine. We also know that we both bring in Shabbos and escort her out, over a cup of wine. Additionally, wine is referred to as, "that which gladdens the hearts of men" (Tehillim 104:15).

Then there is a second side to wine. A nazir is considered someone who has become uniquely sanctified because he has abstained from drinking wine. The downfall of the children of Aaron happened because of the wine that they drank (Rashi, Vayikra 10:2). In our parsha Noach plants a vineyard, drinks wine, becomes drunk and loses his dignity, and thereby incurs shame on himself and a curse on one of his children. The Gemara states that "wine brings about all tragedies" (Berachos 40a).

So how do we understand wine? Is it something positive and a divine elixir, or is it a poison that drives a person away from all that is good and noble?

This dichotomy is actually alluded to in the responsa of the Radvaz (2, 615) where someone asks him about the nature of the drinking of the children of Aaron. He speaks about it a bit and then he states: "you need to be aware that there are two types of wine, the wine that is poisonous and intoxicates, and on the other hand the wine that brings about joy. It all depends on the intention of the drinker. The children of Aaron were seeking the wine

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that intoxicates. They rejected the wine, 'that has been kept in the grapes from the six days of creation' and therefore they deserve death".

The words of the Radvaz are cryptic. Let us try to understand them with an explanation that the Maharal gives (Sanhedrin 78 and other places). The Gemara there states: "Rav Chanan says that wine was created in the world only for two reasons: to comfort mourners, and to pay the wicked their reward in this world." It's a little bit hard to understand the seemingly random juxtaposition of these two purposes, but we do gather that one is very positive and one is very negative; i.e. the comforting of mourners seems to be something very positive, whereas the paying back the wicked with the reward in this world seems to be something very negative. So once again we see in the words of the Gemara that there are two types of drinking.

Let us, then, try and understand a little bit about what is it that drinking represents and expresses. The Maharal explains that of all the physical foodstuffs we ingest, wine is unique, because wine comes from "something hidden, within something that's hidden". This means to say, that the grape is the fruit itself, the juice is the hidden essence of that fruit, and the fermented wine is hidden within that hidden juice. This represents "sod" which means 'secret' in Hebrew. As the gemara states, "when wine enters, one's sod (secrets) exists." The word "sod - secret" and the word "yayin - wine" actually have the same gematria (numerical value).

This is parallel to the process of Hashem creating the world, wherein He created the world as is perceived on the surface, together with a multitude of deeper understandings and realities. The outer layer of the world is that which the physical senses and the rational mind grasp. The senses feel the object physically, while the rational mind defines it. But there is something deeper within this world, an inner essence. The body and senses cannot perceive this reality, nor can the rational mind, for it, too, is limited to that which can be grasped by the senses and extrapolated by reason. The mind cannot process that which is beyond the senses and beyond even reason. However, when we succeed in bringing out some of the inner essence of a person, some of that inner awareness that transcends reason, then that person is able to "grasp" things that lie beyond reason.

This ability to reach beyond the constraints of the superficial and physical world is an incredible faculty, and can be a great blessing. For instance, going back to the words of the Gemara, when someone is in mourning, something has been lost to him forever. As far

as human beings can perceive with their senses and "reason", death is final and there is nothing after that, and thus the loss is irreversible and eternal. Try as hard as we may, there is no way for our physical minds to "understand" that there is life after death. But when we loosen the shackles of our senses and rigid physical reasoning, we are able to perceive that there is a world after our world, a world that is eternal and whose essence cannot be grasped by the senses, or even by the mind. This is how wine enables the mourner to rise above his sorrow.

Similarly, when a person praises Hashem, he starts with prose. While such prose is limited to our experiences, our knowledge, and our understanding, Hashem's true praise rises beyond that. That true praise is shira - song, and that is the ultimate praise. Shira is enabled by the wine that liberates us from our world of sense and reason, and allows us to rise higher. This is why true shira demands wine.

This liberation is only possible for a person who has risen as high as he can with his actions and his mind, and is now looking to rise even higher. His "drink" is simply a push further. However, a person who has not reigned in his physical drives and passions, and is looking for wine to loosen the last remnants of reason from his body, is acting most destructively. A person who has few deeds and even less developed daas is fooling himself terribly when he claims that the wine "elevated" him. Besides the crudeness and vulgarity that the drinking evokes, its experiences are nonsense. What he thinks are "deeper revelations" are in fact nothing but idle fantasies. Yes, they "transcend" the mind, but not because they're revealing a greater truth, rather because they fall very far short of any truth.

Thus, the Torah is revealing to us the correct understanding of the "wine" experience. When a person has climbed the ladder of kedusha and daas and is using wine to say shira to HKB" H, it is most uplifting. But when a person drinks to forget the reality around him and to free himself from the moral constraints of daas, then not only is one not uplifted, rather one is falling into the deepest of abysses. Indeed, it is the fool's paradise of the wicked!

#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

##### **The Safest Place**

Make for yourself an Ark (Teva) made of gopher wood; you shall make the Ark (Teva) with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch. (Breishis 6:14) [When] she could no longer hide him, she took [for] him a basket (Teva) made of reeds, smeared it with clay and pitch, placed the child into it, and put [it] into the marsh at the river's edge. (Shemos 2:3)

It is a fascinating fact that both Noach and Moshe were floated to safety in something called a Teva. The word Teva can mean a word. What is the connection? A word is a vessel that carries and conveys an idea just like an ark bears its precious cargo. They serve similar functions. There is a deeper implication here and that is that both Noach and Moshe were saved by a word. What in the world could that possibly mean? Which is the word that creates a safe haven in a stormy world?!

I have a number of theories but let us try on a direct quote from Shlomo HaMelech the wisest of all men, "The name of HASHEM is a tower of strength, the righteous run into it and are secure." (Mishlei 18:10) That word would be the name of HASHEM!

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin writes in the third gate of Nefesh HaChaim the following sublime promise: "And truthfully, this is a great matter and a wondrous treasure that takes him out of the realm of any other judgments and the desires of others, so that they can't control him, nor make any impression at all. When a person fixes it in his heart/mind to state, that after all:

HASHEM is the true G-d and there is no other power in the universe nor in all the worlds at all other than Him, and everything is filled only with His (blessed be His name) simple unity, and he, in his heart/mind, completely nullifies all others, and does not attend to any power or will in the universe, and harnesses and adheres the purity of his thoughts only to the unique HASHEM (blessed is He) then He will make it happen for him, that in any case all of the powers and desires that are in the universe will be nullified from upon him, so that they are not able to affect him in any way at all."

This is truly remarkable but how does it work?

On the flipside of the same coin the Meor Einayim Quotes the Baal Shem Tov in Parsha Shemini and he says the following: "All of the frights even from wild animals that affect a person, it is the intention of HASHEM Blessed is He to frighten him in order that he should remember to fear HASHEM. If the person is wise and he contemplates this then nothing which is frightening to him will harm him because the original intention of HASHEM to frighten him was not to punish him through the fright, but rather to but rather that the fright should bring him to fear HASHEM and so the man did. However, if the person does not think deeply about this and does not come to fear HASHEM then that which he is afraid of will bring harm upon him."

The person who has aligned his thoughts and feelings with the Creator of the Universe and is

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completely nullified in His to His glorious presence is not in need of being frightened and reminded of where he needs to be. He is there already! Maybe that's why one of the names that is used in reference to HASHEM is HaMokem, literally the place, because that's the ultimate destination. Where are we going!? What are we looking for!? Where are we!?

I once heard from Rabbi Shimshon Pinchus zl. that he missed his connecting flight to Israel during a brief stopover in London. The loudspeaker was announcing, "The gate is closing. Last call for flight xyz." He was Davening Mincha at the time and he didn't hurry even a little bit. It was a major headache for him to get another flight and reunite with his luggage again in Israel, when he was asked why he didn't Daven a little faster to make his plane, he said, "Where am I going!? I am with HASHEM!" Amazing! His journey, on that particular expedition and in his life, was not a horizontal excursion but rather it was a vertical orientation.

If someone has everything in the world but lacks HASHEM then by definition that person is in hot water. Someone who is attached to HASHEM and yet he has nothing else in this world, finds himself in the safest place.

#### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

##### **Rav Doron Perz**

##### **Why Wasn't Noah the First Jew?**

Why wasn't Noach (Noah) the first Jew? After all, what could be more Jewish an act than what Noach did – the entire world was saved because of him! Everybody else died in the flood, but he remained a complete tzaddik (righteous person), walked with G-d, remained true to his inner compass and G-dly values when all around him were falling and floundering. What could be more Jewish than that?

Yet, Avraham (Abraham) was the first Jew, not Noach.

It seems that Noach was an incredible individual, but he didn't save and didn't impact on even one other human being. Can it be a Jewish act, when the entire world was falling all around him that he couldn't even influence one person? Not one person could come into the light of the life that he lived? Was it all about defense and protection, and not about impacting on others? Something was missing.

Our Sages say Noach didn't pray for his generation – perhaps he felt that they were not worthy, and that only he was worthy.

The Sforno says "a tzaddik who only focuses on his own internal perfection, then only he will be saved." But a tzaddik who is able to focus on the lives of others, take responsibility

for others, and feel that their destiny is intertwined with others – they will impact on the lives of others.

That is the reason why Avraham became the first Jew. When we first encounter him, we hear about the souls he influenced in Charan. Not only Avraham and Sarah came to the Land of Israel – tens of people came with them. They impacted on the lives of others. That is the Jewish way.

We need to be involved in our own personal growth, to be the best people we can be – but it doesn't end with us and our home. It has to be far broader. There has to be a sense of communal responsibility, national responsibility, a responsibility for society and all those around us. That is the Jewish way.

May we all take inspiration from Noach who was able to stand up to such tempestuous challenges, but ultimately live the life of Avraham, the Jewish life, which is focused on both our internal spiritual lives while also taking full responsibility for those around us.



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**Rav Soloveitchik on Bereshit: Vice and Virtue in the Vineyard**

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

Immediately after the deluge comes a brief episode of Noach's ignominy. "He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself in his tent" (Genesis 9:21).

First on the scene was Cham, who "saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside" (9:22). Shem and Yefet then covered Noach respectfully. After waking from his drunken stupor, Noach cursed Cham—by way of Canaan—for his conduct (9:25). What exactly did Cham do that was deserving of a curse?

Schadenfreude... or Worse

The Ramban opines that Cham sinned by not modestly covering his father and by not concealing from others the shameful condition in which he had found him. He actively sought to demean his father in a public forum, which is why it says that he broadcast it "outside" (Genesis 9:22).<sup>[1]</sup>

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik takes this a step further.

Cham seemed all too pleased to discover a deficiency in his father and make it public knowledge. Cham was the type of person eager to disabuse people of their false impressions, to scratch off the veneer and reveal the tin under what turns out to be only thin gold plate. "Show me a saint and I'll show you a sinner," say the Chams of the world.<sup>[2]</sup>

The fact that Cham was cursed, the Rav emphasizes, does not mean that Noach's behavior was excusable, but it was understandable. Cham should have been considerate and taken into account that his father survived the destruction of a world he had lived in for half a millennium. People have drunk themselves silly for less. His misstep did not deserve to be circulated for public scrutiny. Only the mean-spirited

would expose their own father and blow a private peccadillo out of proportion. Both father and son showed poor judgment, but only one acted out of malice.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Talmud has two interpretations conveying that a more heinous sin took place. "Rav and Shmuel: one says that he castrated him, the other says that he sodomized him."<sup>[4]</sup> Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, a grandson of the Rav and a rosh yeshivah at Yeshivat Har Etzion, understands these opinions to be communicating ways in which Cham rejected his father. Castration indicates that Cham felt his father's vitality had ebbed and that he was no longer an influence in his life. Sexual exploitation represents Cham's belittling his father and acting in a superior manner. He took advantage of his father to make himself more powerful.<sup>[5]</sup>

Ethics vs. Etiquette

In contrast to Cham, his brothers acted laudably. "Shem and Yefet took (וְנָשָׁמָנָה), a garment and laid it on both their shoulders, and they walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness" (Genesis 9:23). Although the general impression is that they acted in tandem, the verb for taking the garment is in the singular (וְנָשָׁמָן) and followed by Shem's name, which alludes to

the fact that Shem took the initiative in performing the meritorious deed.<sup>[6]</sup> This is particularly noteworthy since many commentators understand Yefet to have been the eldest of Noach's sons.<sup>[7]</sup>

The Midrash identifies the rewards of the sons with specificity. Shem's descendants, the Jewish people, receive the garment which bears tzitzit, and Yefet's descendants receive burial. More specifically, the people of Gog, descendants of Yefet, will be given proper burial in the war of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 39:11).<sup>[8]</sup> In what way are these rewards appropriate recompense for the brothers' actions?

The Rav sees in these rewards a reflection of each one's motivations: ethics and etiquette. Shem covered his father out of ethical duty, which applies even where there are

no onlookers to applaud. Ideally, the garment of tzitzit is intended to be worn underneath one's clothes (with only the tzitzit in view),<sup>[9]</sup> which represents acting ethically even in private. Yefet, on the other hand, only acted out of concern for what Shem would say. He acted out of etiquette, which changes in different times and places, and is only observed in public. Since etiquette is, at its base, about human dignity, his descendants merited burial, the ultimate act of respect for human beings. Clearly, Shem's motivation was the greater of the two.

This explanation also clarifies Noach's blessing to the two sons: "May God bring beauty to Yefet, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27). Yefet was concerned with outward appearances, which is the realm of aesthetics. Therefore, beauty and aesthetics shall be the heritage of his progeny. Shem was driven by moral

considerations, and so his offspring receive the Shechinah, the divine presence, in their midst. One who acts ethically and morally, especially when others do not, is deserving of God's direct rewards.<sup>[10]</sup>

Exploring the Rav's Insight

The episode analyzed above occurred right after the cataclysmic Flood. Man set about reestablishing his presence on Earth. The passage describing this episode is traditionally set apart from surrounding ones with spaces, and its first two verses read: "The sons of Noach who left the ark were Shem, Cham, and Yefet.... These three were the sons of Noach, and from these was the Earth populated" (Genesis 9:18-19). To extend the Rav's thoughts, perhaps Noach's sons represent three types of people.

Cham promulgates hate and destruction, even against his own family. The Mishnah warns: "Shmuel the Younger used to quote: 'Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy' (Proverbs 24:17)."<sup>[11]</sup> How much more is this true regarding a friend or family member.

Yefet's prime interest is the respect and honor that should be accorded all mankind. While this is valuable and merits reward, it is not intended to be the ultimate pursuit of man.

Shem is sincerely dedicated to morality and virtue. This is the loftiest human ideal and especially praiseworthy when it is put into practice. No wonder,

then, that Avraham, who defended unrepentant sinners, was his direct descendant. Additionally, Shem is traditionally known for having established a bet midrash, a house of study. Yaakov studied there for fourteen years to inculcate a moral compass that would guide him in his long exposure to Lavan's shiftiness.[12]

As Jews we are both the physical and spiritual descendants of our ancestor Shem. His moral, principled conduct laid the foundation for a noble way of life which would be developed and perfected by his esteemed descendant Avraham. Indeed, Shem's ethical code formed the spiritual bedrock of the Jewish nation for all time.

Notes: [1] Ramban on Genesis 9:18 (end). Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno similarly suggests that he rejoiced at the indignity of his father and eagerly spread the word to his brothers. Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor finds fault with Cham's failure to cover Noach himself. [2] See Soloveitchik, *Yemei Zikaron*, 128–129. [3] Chumas Mesoras Harav, 1:62–63. [4] Sanhedrin 70a, quoted by Rashi on Genesis 9:22, s.v. עיראת את וירא אביך. [5] Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, "Noach and His Sons," <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/noach-and-his-sons> (accessed March 7, 2021). [6] Rashi on Genesis 9:23, s.v. יפה שם ויקח. [7] See, e.g., Rashi on Genesis 10:21 and Ramban on Genesis 6:10. [8] Rashi on Genesis 9:23, s.v. והי. [9] See Magen Avraham, 8:13. [10] Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, 272–273. The basic analysis might owe a debt to the commentary of the Netziv in his *Ha'amek Davar* on Genesis 9:23. He comments that Shem's alacrity in covering his father and not waiting for assistance, was an expression of his feeling that he had to act, akin to performing a mitzvah in which one is obligated. Yefet only stepped in to help after seeing his brother struggle alone to cover his father. [11] *Pirkei Avot*, 4:24. [12] See Rashi on Genesis 28:9, s.v. בבית אחות.

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from: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Oct 19, 2023, 11:32 PM

subject: Shabbat Shalom: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Noach 5784  
BS"D Please remember Hersh ben Perel Chana, the nearly 200 additional hostages in Gaza, members of the IDF, and fellow Jews in Israel during this period when we are all under constant attack. Remember our fellow Jews in the rest of the world as attacks against our people increase. The Chabad posting at the end of the first attachment gives Internet addresses for Tehillim (psalms) to recite daily to pray for our people. The downloads present the psalms in Hebrew and in English.

BS"D October 20, 2023

#### Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #2, October 20, 2023; 5 Cheshvan, 5784; Noach

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of nearly 200 hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Rabbi David Fohrman and AlephBeta.org produced a podcast this week exploring connections in evil between Hamas and parshat Noach. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully, with the help of Hashem.

For my introduction to Sefer Bereishis last week, I investigated some parallels in the parsha and later in the Torah that connect to good and evil – an appropriate focus on the first Shabbat after Hamas' pogrom against our people. This week, Rabbi David Fohrman and Imu Shalev (CEO of AlephBeta.org) have introduced a podcast on connections between parshat

Noach and Hamas. (I have not yet had an opportunity to listen to the podcast, but I hope to do so before Shabbat.) Rabbi Fohrman mentions in particular that the Hebrew word "chamas" means violence – an appropriate definition of Hamas.

Parshat Noach contains two stories. It opens with the story of the flood and closes with the Tower of Babel. In both situations, Hashem intervenes in response to dangers from humans. From God's initial work creating a place for humans (plus animals and vegetation), the world and humans in it quickly become evil. God decides to undo the world and start over. The steps of destroying the first world parallel exactly the steps of God's creating the world, but in reverse (repeating the same words). Hashem follows the same steps to create a second world, with some subtle differences. God then permits Noach to open the teva and initiate a new world. This new world also starts a downward spiral. The parsha ends with people from numerous cultures living together in the plain of Shinar. The people decide to work together to make bricks and build a tower to show their greatness. On the surface, the people seem to be honorable. They live together in peace, work together on projects, and discover new types of technology. Why does God see a need to intervene and stop what they are doing?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents the best explanation I have ever seen of why the people of Shinar are evil. In chapter 10, the Torah reports that the people spread out and that each group has its own language. In chapter 11, suddenly we find that everyone has a common language. Using a variety of sources, Rabbi Sacks finds that the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal II "made the totality of all peoples speak one speech." A cylinder inscription of Sargon II indicates that he imposed a common language and culture on all the small nations that Assyria conquered. Rabbi Sacks deduces that when God mixes up the languages of the builders of the Tower of Babel, He is restoring the traditional cultures and languages of the nations that the Assyrians had stifled. God tells Noach and his descendants to disperse and settle the land – thereby developing different cultures to provide diversity in the world. This diversity is what the people of Shinar destroy, and God wants to stop the process from going any further.

Hamas represents a return of the spirit of "chamas" from the Torah – the evil of violence. Hamas wants to destroy Israel and other non-Arab cultures – exactly what Rabbi Sacks interprets as the basic ill of the people of Shinar. After killing all the Jews and taking over Israel, Hamas wants to go after the United States and other countries that do not follow what Hamas represents. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine's view is consistent. He states that there is a red line that no culture may pass, that doing so is pure evil and that every society must recognize. When a group passes this line, intellectuals and politicians must recognize that such a group is evil and that there is no excuse for tolerating them.

After the evils of the generations following Noach, God turns to a "plan C" – start with a few decent, honest, just individuals who will inform others of the evils in society and influence them to work for a better world, one dedicated to Hashem (rather than to human glory). Over time, hopefully these good individuals will help make the world a better place, one dedicated to God and His values, one that works to eliminate evil. For the remainder of the Torah, we turn to Avraham, his descendants, and his legacy.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, recognized evil when it reached our community, and he strongly spoke out against evil in our community and abroad. He was a chaplain in the Navy and looked forward each summer to his reserve duty with the men who served our country. He was a strong influence on my son Evan, when he decided to serve our country (but in the Air Force rather than on a ship).

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the

pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom, Hannah and Alan Alan A. Fisher American Dahlia Society 1 Rock Falls Ct. Rockville, MD 20854 USA

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**Rabbi Yissoel Reisman** – Parshas Noah 5784

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>

date: Oct 20, 2023, 12:04 AM

**Rabbi Reisman's Chumash Shiur**

**The Current Matzav in Eretz Yisrael**

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Noah in a different world, a world of great worry, sadness for the past, and probably greater is the worry for the future. For Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael, for Klal Yisrael all over the world. But particularly for those who are Omdim Al Mishmar Arzeinu, those soldiers who are standing at the borders in the north and south of Eretz Yisrael and ready to be Moser Nefesh to protect Klal Yisrael.

I would like to share with you something that Rav Chaim Shmulevitz has in Sichos Mussar. (In the new editions of Sichos Mussar, there is a section of Matzav Hazman or Regel Hazman which is at the end. Those are the Shmuzzin that he said during the six day war). There I believe in the 4th Maimar, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz says something very powerful. He says, we know that Rochel Imeinu is the one who is (מבהה עלי-בננה), who cries for her children, who cries for Klal Yisrael. It is her cries that HKB”H answers and says to her as the Navi Yirmiya says 31:15 (הַעֲמִקָּה, מִזְמְרָתָה, וְעַנְנָה, קְוָלָה) (שְׁבוֹ מִאָרֶץ אֶזְבֶּל). Rochel stop weeping and (שְׁבוֹ מִאָרֶץ אֶזְבֶּל) Klal Yisrael will return. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks why not the other Imahos. What about Sarah, Rivka and Leah who certainly were as aware of the Tzaros of Klal Yisrael as Rochel was and why is it Rochel more than anybody else?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz says something really incredible. He says it is not similar the feeling of pain to feel along with people who are struggling when you are there as when you are not there. Meaning to say, even a Neshama Kedosha like the Imahos, there is a difference in how they feel along with the Tzar of Klal Yisrael if they are there, if they are where Klal Yisrael is in the moment of Tzarah, and if they are not there. If they are not at that exact spot at the time of Tzarah. Rochel is there, she is at the side of the road and since she is at the side of the road, her feelings, her Hergaishim are stronger. The Imahos certainly Davened, the Avos as well. But it doesn't come to the feeling of someone who is there.

Says Rav Chaim Shmulevitz in very powerful terms, that those who are in Eretz Yisrael and say that they will go to Chutz L'aretz and from Chutz L'aretz they will Daven for those who are in Eretz Yisrael, he says Sheker Heim Omrim, it is a lie. Those who are in Chutz L'aretz and are far away can't possibly Daven like those who are close. He encourages everyone to stay. Mind you this is during the six day war, a time of far greater Sakana than we have today.

The message that we have to take from this, is the underlying message. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz is saying, if you think you can Daven far away from this and Daven properly, Sheker Heim Omrim. It is not true. It is very difficult. It is a challenge that we have to respond to. It is a challenge that we need to realize. Those who are closer there, certainly feel the mood much more and more appropriately and their Davening is different. Those who are actually on the front lines even more so. Those of us who are so far away, we need to

work very hard to be able to feel along with the feelings of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael. The sorrow of the extraordinary losses we've had. The pain of people who are being held captive by subhuman behaving people. The worry of so many of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael, so many young men who are standing ready really to be Moser Nefesh with great courage on behalf of Klal Yisrael. We need to be Mechazeik in our Tefilla.

The Torah presents two Pesukim as a source for the Mitzvah of Davening. Devarim 11:13 (אִיזֶה אָעָזָה שְׁפָלָבּ, בְּכָל-לְבָכָם). Taanis 2a (וְלֹא-כִּי-עָזָה שְׁפָלָבּ, אָזֶה שְׁפָלָבּ). The Gemara says Tefillah is Merumaz in (בְּכָל-לְבָכָם). In loving G-d with all your heart.

The Ramban in the Sefer Hamitzvos bring a different Posuk. He brings the Posuk of somebody who goes out to battle in Bamidbar 10:9 (וְכִי-תַּחֲזִק אֶת-מִלְחָמָה בְּאֶתְנָחָם, עַל-פְּנֵי קָנְזָר אֶתְנָחָם, לְפָנֵי יְהִי רָאֵשׁ אֶתְנָחָם, בְּקָרְבָּנָחָם). When there is a big army standing up against you (הַרְעָמָם, בְּקָרְבָּנָחָם) blow the trumpets. The trumpets Zag the Ramban is the Davening. It is the Davening of a Shas Tzarah, it is a Davening of a time of pain.

We find in the Mishkan the Maisheh Hamenorah that Kula Miksha Hi. The most famous of all of the Keilim that existed is that the Menorah was Miksha. What does Miksha mean? It means it was one solid piece. They took a block of gold and they chiseled out the Menorah. Extraordinarily difficult work and they chiseled out the Menorah. When you chisel out a utensil and it is one piece, it is much more difficult to do. It takes a lot more work to do. But what you end up with is much stronger because it is one piece.

Actually, we find this somewhere else. We find in Parshas Behaloscha 10:2 (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר-בְּעַלְמָה, פְּנֵי שְׁלָמָה, לְפָנֵי תְּצִירָתָה, פְּנֵי שְׁלָמָה). That the trumpets that were blown were also made (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ). It must be very hard to make a trumpet by etching it out from one solid piece of silver, but that is what the trumpets were. What is the similarity between the Menorah and the trumpets that both of them are made (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ)?

I once saw I believe in the Sefer Drush V'ha'iyun, the following from Rav Zalman Sorotzkin. He says (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ), when something is etched out of a solid piece, it is very hard to do but you end up with something very strong. The Menorah represents Limud Hatorah, it represents the proper study of Torah. It needs Ameilus, it needs a lot of hard work. Without Yigia it is not possible to really accomplish. There are many people who learn, they relax, sit back with their coffee and cake and they learn. Okay, it is very commendable, but it is not what the Menorah is. The Menorah represents the highest level of Limud Hatorah. Torah which the Menorah represents Chochmas Hatorah. It requires Ameilus, a lot of hard work and being strong. You have to be powerful. There are a lot of moments where a person is learning and he feels a Yiush, he doesn't understand, he doesn't get it. There is something difficult, he doesn't get it. It requires a lot of strength, a lot of pushing and on the other hand it creates a very powerful Limud Hatorah.

The (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ), the trumpets are those that were used to call people to Milchama, to battle. The sound of the Tekia from the trumpet is a call to battle. (עַל-פְּנֵי קָנְזָר אֶתְנָחָם, בְּקָרְבָּנָחָם). Going out to battle requires a lot of hard work, a lot of courage, it is not easy. The Ameilus, the hard work, the focus, to be able to do what needs to be done is immense. A person can't make a mistake when a person goes out to such a front. He can't make a mistake. It is like somebody who etches out, he has to make the utensil out of one solid piece and he is chiseling. If he makes one mistake he has to start all over again. It broke and then it is not one solid piece. So too, somebody who goes to Milchama.

A person who sits and learns and a person who goes out to Milchames Yisrael, both of them are compared one to the other. They are both (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ), they both require a tremendous amount of devotion and not only do they require a devotion but it has to continue. The Ameilus has to continue. You have got to be strong. You have got to be like iron. Davening at the time of Milchama, the Ramban says we learn from (הַרְעָמָם, בְּקָרְבָּנָחָם). So that the Tefilla then too, has to be the Ameilus V'hatzlacha. It has to be with hard work and Hatzlacha.

I am failing. I am not Davening the way I should be Davening. It should be a different Davening. When I say (מְגַן אֶבְרָהָם) and I talk about Hashem

protecting. How can it be that not every time I have the right Kavana? When I say (רַקְיָה בְּעִנָּנוּ), Hashem fight our battles. How can it be I don't always have the right Kavana? How can it be? Somebody who is going out to battle can't make a mistake, he can't slip up once. It can't be. Those of us who are representing the Ameilus, the support system for those who are standing there, they need to have that same type of a power.

There is actually a third (הַשְׁקָעָה) besides the (הַתְּצִדְקָה) and the Menorah the Keruvim were also (הַשְׁקָעָה). I don't know why. It could be the Sh'leimus is in the connection between the Jewish people and the Shechina has to have that same hard Ameilus. It all goes to one place, it goes to the Keruvim which shows the love of Klal Yisrael to the Ribbono Shel Olam from where the Shechina speaks. Perhaps that is why it is all connected. But this call (תְּצִדְקָה, מִתְּמִתָּה), you got to be iron, you got to be solid, you got to be powerful. B'ezras Hashem hopefully we will be and will have that Koach Ha'tefilla.

In Flatbush we are planning on this Sunday an outdoor Atzeres Tefilla in front of Rabbi Landau's Shul. Ashkenazim, Sefardim, Chassidim, all parts of the Orthodox Torah community of Flatbush are called to come together in one big Kol to Daven one Mincha as an Am Rav at 2 pm followed by Tehillim. We need to do it. We need to make it count. We need to make it be something that will be a protection. We need the strength, the Ameilus to stand and really we are going to Daven a proper Davening, feel a proper feeling and feel the Hergesh of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael. There is nothing going on in the world.

I remember my father in law Alav Hashalom telling me that when he was in the labor camps by the Nazis Yemach Shemam, he and his friends used to say to each other, could it be that there are Jews somewhere in the world sitting at a Shabbos table eating Cholent and saying Divrei Torah and enjoying the Shabbos table? Could it be? In middle of such a nightmare, could it be?

There are sometimes that I get this feeling and Boruch Hashem that Tzarah was an unparalleled Tzarah and Boruch Hashem today we are in a much better place. I don't mean to compare except the Hergish, the feeling that could it be that we are forgetting what is going on and the heavy weight that sits on Klal Yisrael. Could it be that we are really not thinking of Eretz Yisrael? Could it be that we stand a Shemoneh Esrei and don't feel that we are facing Eretz Yisrael? Could it be? Could it be that there are restaurants in Brooklyn where people are sitting and joking around and having parties? Could it be that there are people watching football games when these things are going on? Could it be that there is somebody in Flatbush that would be watching a football game when the Tzibbur is getting together at a Kinus Tefilla? Can there be such a human being? I don't think it could be. It shouldn't be. We have to feel, we have to be Margish, it is not easy. (הַשְׁקָעָה), we have to be tough and strong and B'ezras Hashem we will be.

HKB'H please see the coming together of Klal Yisrael, the efforts of Klal Yisrael. The tremendous outpouring of financial help in Eretz Yisrael. The government wasn't ready for 380,000 soldiers to be outfitted. I know somebody in the Golan in the army, it is cold there at night and the rain will come soon. They are not ready for it. We need to get together to do what has to be done. To find honest places, as there are many dishonest places. You have to make sure to be responsible and in an honest direction, give of ourselves, to give of our finances, to give of our hearts, to give of our time and IY'H Klal Yisrael will come together Vayichan Yisrael as one. K'am Echad we will be Matzliach. I want to wish everybody an absolutely wonderful meaningful Shabbos and we look forward to Besuros Tovos!

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### **The Noah in Each of Us: Israel at War By Mordechai Plotker**

October 19, 2023

As Sukkot came to a close, sirens echoed across Israel just before dawn on October 7, as hordes of Hamas terrorists from Gaza launched a horrifying

surprise attack on countless Israeli towns and cities by air, ground and sea. While a significant number of the 5,000 missiles indiscriminately fired from Gaza were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome, countless others sadly penetrated population centers and military installations. This barbaric attack was nothing short of a modern-day Tisha B'Av, Kristallnacht pogrom.

During challenging times, we turn our line of sight to the Torah. The parsha begins by describing, in brevity, three remarkable qualities possessed by Noach. These are the generations of Noach; Noach was a) righteous (not involved in random violence (hamas) like the rest of his generation), b) perfect in his generations (consistent and thorough in the way he practiced his virtues), and c) Noach walked with God, an exceptional and rare virtue (Bereishis 6:9).

How then is it possible for Noach, who had these three powerful attributes to be, as Rashi notes, a "Ma'amin v'aino Ma'amin, one who lacks faith in God"? Noach, with his sons, his wife and his son's wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. (Bereishis 7:7). Explains the Medrash, "Were it not for the fact that the flood waters reached his ankles, he would have not entered the ark!" (Bereishis Rabbah: 32:9). Is Rashi suggesting that Noach, who demonstrated his faith in God, despite the ridicule from his less than average peers, by investing 120 years constructing the Titanic of his generation, lacked resolute faith in God to deliver on His word to destroy the world, and only boarded the ark when the water reached his ankles?

Citing BT Moed Katan, 16b, the Kedushas Levi explains tzaddik moshel b'yiras Elokim, the righteous govern through "fear of God." Here Rav Abahu explains that: "I (God) rule over man. But who (as it were) rules over me? The tzaddik! For I decree a harsh punishment, and the tzaddik cancels it with his prayers." Noach, however, did not actively attempt to positively influence people (by rebuking them). Noach may have felt inadequate to cancel a Divine decree perhaps because he did not consider himself much of a tzaddik. If he were to be saved, his lot would be no different as others that would also be saved. When God noticed this, He told Noach (Bereishis 6:13) that He would have to proceed with His intention to destroy the human race as there was no one who had tried to intercede.

Rabbi Norman Lamm dovetails the reasoning of the Kedushat Levi opining that, "the object of emuna (faith) in this context, is not God but oneself. All of us, by virtue of our mortality and finitude, need God, and God knows we all need each other. After 120 years of building the ark, Noach remained a ma'amin (believer) who perhaps thought to himself, "I have been spared so long, I will surely be spared longer. Concurrently, Noach was also an aino ma'amim, lacking faith in himself, thinking, there is nothing that makes me worthy of being saved. I am helpless and hopeless. Extremes of over and under-confidence, of both an excess and a want of faith in oneself, is a sign of m'katney emuna, a lack of faith in God.

Since the tragedy unfolded more than a week ago, Klal Yisroel had initially felt hopeless, helpless and withdrawn. We were ma'amin when the news alerts started flowing in, and v'aino ma'amim that such a horrific series of events could actually occur. How can we dance hakafot? What can we, so far away, do to help? And yet, overnight, the United States, Canada and countless countries flooded El Al planes with what will become known as one of the largest and consistent transfers of equipment, morale and psychological encouragement the world has ever witnessed.

We all became tzaddikim, capable of turning the tide in this war, regaining lost territory and neutralizing terrorists responsible for the murder of our brothers and sisters in cold blood.

Dozens of duffle bags, boxes filled with medical, logistical, operational and tactical gear are being transported daily. Most importantly, our chayalim are in receipt of religious garments such as tzitzit and kipot, and religious "clothing" that take the beautiful form of daily Tehillim and mishbeirach for harchavat hadaat, blessing for peace of mind. Children are writing letters, reservists are being cheered as they board flights from Newark airport, and the food—plenty of shawarma and Bissli too. Mi k'Amcha Yisroel, Who is like Your nation Israel!

We are now operating around the clock as Gur Aryeh Yehuda. Why? Because Netzach Yisrael lo yishaker,” (1-Shmuel, 15:29). We have readily replaced the aino ma’amin with a ma’amin confident mentality. We are united in conviction, resolute with determination and ready to engage a new chapter of Jewish history replete with Jewish pride in our collective steadfast commitment to Torat Yisroel, kedushat Yisroel and Am Yisroel.

And this he said of Judah: “Hear, Hashem, the voice of Judah. And restore him to his people. Though his own hands strive for him, Help him against his foes.” (Devarim, 33:7).

Am Yisroel chai, v’kayam!

Mordechai Plotsker runs a popular 10-minute nightly shiur on the parsha with a keen interest on the invigorating teachings of the Berditchever Rav, the Kedushas Levi. Plotsker resides in Elizabeth with his wife and children, and can be reached by email at [marc.plotsker@gmail.com](mailto:marc.plotsker@gmail.com).

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from: Lehrhaus <editors@thelehrhaus.com>

date: Oct 19, 2023, 2:00 PM

subject: What The Israel-Hamas War is Really About

**Rabbi Dov Lerner**

Six decades ago—in a highly secretive, logically complex, and profoundly important mission—four undercover Israeli operatives seized one of the world’s most wanted criminals in the dead of night on a quiet street in Argentina. The year was 1960. Their captive was Adolf Eichmann.

Responsible for orchestrating the transportation of Europe’s Jews to the ghettos and the camps and one of the highest-ranking members of the Third Reich, he was charged with crimes against humanity and put on trial in Jerusalem for the world to see.

The press coverage was comprehensive and unprecedented, and it gripped the global imagination for months on end. Day after day, pages and pages were dedicated to disseminating the hours of harrowing testimony. But of all the extraordinary reporting that emerged from that court, journalism’s most lasting contribution was a single four-word phrase, coined by a renowned philosopher who reported on the case for *The New Yorker*. Her name was Hannah Arendt, and her phrase was “the banality of evil.”

Sitting amid the countless rows of correspondents, diplomats, and observers, she covered the Eichmann trial from start to finish, and she confessed that the thing which perplexed her most about the entire episode was Eichmann’s absolute mediocrity. Knowing that he had directed deportations, led liquidations, and advanced the extermination of an entire population, she had expected the man at the defense bench to seem like a demonic, diabolical, monstrous creature. She had expected to see a savage villain to match the evil reputation that preceded him.

But sitting quietly behind bulletproof glass, he appeared simply as an inconspicuous bureaucrat—unexceptional and unremarkable in every way. And it was this nondescript presence that led her to invent the expression “the banality of evil”—along with the idea that while we may expect brutal atrocities to be carried out by malformed fiends, crimes against humanity can be committed, almost casually, by otherwise ordinary people.

As the horrors perpetrated by Hamas have come to light, many questions have come to fore. But perhaps the one question that has occupied the minds of every civilized person on Earth has been not theological—“how God could let this happen?”—but anthropological. How could human beings be so inhumane? How could human beings be so depraved and perpetrate such outrageous barbarity?

And, from my perspective, the answer to that question is—regrettably—rather simple. There is nothing in human nature that makes us humane. There is nothing in our DNA that teaches us that every single person on Earth deserves care and attention and sympathy and dignity. As creatures, we are all moral blank slates, motivated at our core by a sequence of what one notorious biologist has called ‘selfish genes.’ Driven by the impulse to survive, our primal instincts are egocentric and self-absorbed, narcissistic and oblivious to any call for sacrifice or philanthropy.

It may well be true, as some anthropologists have suggested, that evolution favors not the fittest but the friendliest—and that we, as a species, have survived over time by expanding our horizons, deepening our sympathies, and investing in friends. But even this theory does not see human beings driven by a sense of moral obligation but, fundamentally, by a bid for self-preservation—where our friends are not an end in themselves but the best bet for our own survival.

Though I was born and raised in Great Britain, I am—despite their flaws—in near-constant awe of the founders and framers of the United States and its laws. But there are two words in the American Declaration of Independence to which I take exception. Speaking of the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” They are not self-evident.

The idea that every single human being has a right to life is not self-evident to our selfish genes; it needs to be taught. The idea that every single human being has a right to liberty is not self-evident to our selfish genes; it needs to be taught. And the idea that every single human being has a right to seek meaning and pursue happiness is not self-evident to our selfish genes; it too needs to be taught.

And that is where the Torah’s story begins—with the opening pages of Genesis.

Standing at the summit of Mount Sinai, a single prophet and leader of slaves inscribed a groundbreaking phrase as the culmination of the very first chapter of the Jewish constitution: “God created humanity in His image.” (Genesis 1:27).

Standing at the foot of Sinai the Israelites were told that, at the dawn of time, God pierced the darkness with light and filled the void with life. And then we were taught a vital truth that was anything but self-evident: that every single human being is a vessel of divinity.

When we were born as a nation, we were taught a moral truth that had evaded civilization for millennia—a moral truth that had escaped the potentates and populations of Egypt and Greece and Mesopotamia, smothered beneath the weight of selfish genes and egomania—the moral truth that every single human being, no matter their rank or stature, is worthy of respect and compassion and dignity and care.

It is not “natural” to treat every human being with deference and esteem; it is not “natural” for our appetites to surrender before the call of moral responsibility, which is why—for a whole variety of scholars including Joshua Berman,[1] Kyle Harper,[2] Tom Holland,[3] Eric Nelson,[4] Tomer Persico,[5] and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks[6]—the moral law revealed at Sinai erupted as a revolution in the affairs of humankind.

As Rabbi Sacks put it: “Hitler was not wrong when he called conscience a Jewish invention.”[7] It is not human nature to be humane but the foundation of our faith—a creed that needs to be taught and reinforced repeatedly.

It is not accidental that, in an ordinary year, after we read the first pages of Genesis, our sages direct us to a passage in Isaiah when he says: “So says God... I have summoned you... to be a light unto the nations” (42:6).

God filled the world with light, but He summons us to spread and defend it. The reason that we are willing to pay such a high price for private tuition is not simply so that our kid’s friends have kosher homes, but because we know that the moral code invoked at Sinai is not innate and needs to be taught.

That is why the attempts at impartiality or neutrality on the part of some elite universities is not only tragic but dangerous. It is not human nature to be humane—ethics are not innate. If institutions of higher learning aspire to be more than merely way-stations of information, they ought to train their students not only to process data or articulate different views but to choose a moral frame.

The idea that free speech will inexorably lead to moral clarity and the unwavering devotion to the sanctity of humanity is completely misconceived—so while they ought to permit free speech, they ought to brand not only Hamas but any defense of Hamas for what it has been revealed to be: evil, depraved, and inhumane.

There are competing ideologies out there—where the weak are to be culled, and the old are to be killed, and the other is to be exterminated—and silence or neutrality gives them the space to grow. At the end of his tenure, as a final reminder to our ancestors, Moses said: “Life and death I place before you... choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

We are now in a defensive war against human beings who promote an inhumane ideology—whose barbarity threatens our brothers and sisters, the civilians of the region, and the rest of humanity. This war is to secure Israel’s borders, but more than that it is to combat a cult that incites violence, creates carnage, and celebrates death—it is to liberate those held hostage by those who forsake their humanity.

We can no longer turn the other cheek, because we have a duty to protect the weak and counter the malignant creed which teems in the tunnels beneath the streets of Gaza, where it breeds moral depravity. Tragically this war—as all wars—will entail the loss of human life on all sides, and our minds will no doubt be swimming in images that inspire agony. And at times like this we are reminded of words written by John Stuart Mill:

War is an ugly thing—but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse... [And] as long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of [hu]mankind, human beings must be willing, when need is, to do battle for the one against the other.<sup>[8]</sup>

Evil can be banal because goodness needs to be taught. Cruelty can be casual, inhumanity can become natural, and what we see as unfathomable and incomprehensible can come to pass if we do not do our part to instill human hearts with compassion. Ronald Reagan once said:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. The only way they can inherit the freedom we have known is if we fight for it, protect it, defend it, and then hand it to them with the well taught lessons of how they in their lifetime must do the same. And if you and I don’t do this, then you and I may well spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it once was like in America when men were free.

The idea, first taught on the summit of Sinai to a single prophet and a small band of slaves, has been disseminated by multiple faiths across the ages over the face of the earth so successfully that we take it to be self-evident—but our summons to defend and spread the light of revelation is not yet complete. As long as other ideologies still compete for believers, as long as evil or moral ambiguity still breeds unabated, we have an obligation to stand up and speak out and give voice to heaven’s vision for humanity, where everyone—including the weak and the old and the other—has a divine spark and the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of purpose.

May the coming weeks bring us all a little closer to true peace as we try, with all our hearts, to contest inhumanity and sow the seeds of our collective redemption.

[1] Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). [2] Kyle Harper, “Christianity and the Roots of Human Dignity in Late Antiquity,” in *Christianity and Freedom, Volume 1: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). [3] Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2019). [4] Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). [5] Tomer Persico, *Adam Be-Tzelem Elohim: Ha-Ra’ayon She-Shinah Et Ha-Olam Ye-et Ha-Yahadut* [In God’s Image: The Making of the Modern World] (Rishon le-Tziyon: Yedi’ot Aharonot, 2021). [6] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *A Letter in the Scroll: Understanding Our Jewish Identity and Exploring the Legacy of the World’s Oldest Religion* (New York: Free Press, 2001). [7] Ibid., 190. [8] John Stuart Mill, “The Contest in America,” first published in *Fraser’s Magazine* (February 1862).

Dov Lerner is a member of the inaugural cohort of Sacks Scholars, an international fellowship of educators and communal professionals dedicated to perpetuating the legacy of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. He serves as the rabbi of the Young Israel of Jamaica Estates in Queens, New York, and on

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<https://en.yhb.org.il/revivim1065/>

**Revivim -- Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

**The Sanctity of War and Its Victims**

War today, unlike when we were exiled, must be like the heroism of King David’s wars – with humility before God, but striving for total victory \* What can we learn from the timing of the tragedy occurring specifically on the Shabbat of Simchat Torah \* The irresponsible conduct of the media even during these days \* The sanctity of the fallen, and the comfort they will have in the future

**The Great Challenge**

A great challenge faces us during these days, to strengthen with heroism for a defensive and forceful war, for the sake of the nation and Land. In times of milchemet mitzvah (an obligatory war), the entire nation must participate in the war. The soldiers must go out with valor to the front, to strike a crushing blow against the enemy. And those who remain at home must also gird themselves with valor, for their tranquil heroism at home is what the soldiers at the front line, rely upon. The state and military leadership also relies on their heroism.

**Types of Prayers in Exile vs. Today**

During the long, difficult days of exile, the heroism required of us was to survive despite everything. And the type of prayers expressed pleadings of the poverty of the remnants of Israel, not to be destroyed. However, today, in God’s kindness we have merited returning to our Land, and the prayers must be like those of King David when he went out to war. He prayed intensely, and humbly asked God to help him and his soldiers be valiant and skilled in warfare, so they could vigorously pursue their enemies, and not return until they were destroyed.

**King David’s Prayers**

An example of his prayer is in Psalms 144:

“Of David. Blessed is the Lord, my Rock, Who trains my hands for battle, my fingers for war. My kindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield in Whom I take refuge, Who flattens peoples beneath me.”

But this is not the arrogance of an impetuous hero, but rather a hero who knows he is mortal.

“O Lord, what is man that You should know him, the son of man, that You should consider him? Man is like a breath; his days are as a fleeting shadow.”

His prayer in Psalms 18 is also an example. David first turns humbly to God – recognizing that everything comes from Him. And through this, acknowledges that with God’s help, he and his soldiers defeat the enemy battalions.

“For by You I run upon a troop, and by my God, I scale a wall” – in order to conquer the enemy. “He trains my hands for war, so that a copper bow is bent by my arms. You have given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has supported me, and You have treated me with great humility. You have broadened my steps beneath me, and my ankles have not slipped. I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them, never turning back until they were consumed. I have crushed them so that they cannot rise, they fall beneath my feet. You have girded me with strength for battle; You have subdued my besiegers beneath me. And of my enemies, You have given me the back of their necks; those that hate me, I have destroyed. They cry out, but no one saves them, even to God, but He does not answer them (for they are the wicked who rose against Israel).” Then I ground them as dust before the wind, like mud in the streets, I emptied them out”. And the victory would be great and known throughout the world, to the point that through it: “You make me head of nations, a people I knew not, served me. At the mere hearing of the ear they obeyed me” (they will obey my demands); foreigners (the enemies) shall lie to me; foreigners shall wither, and shall fear their imprisonments” (they will flee the places they thought to take cover against

Israel's army). And in merit of this, we will thank God: "Hashem lives and blessed is my Rock, and exalted is my God, the God of my salvation. The Almighty One who grants me vengeance, and destroys peoples instead of me. My shelter from enemies, even those who rise against me, You raise me above; from the violent man, You deliver me. Therefore, I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the nations, and to Your name I will sing praises". And in the merit of this, the kingdom of Israel will grow greater: "He gives great salutations to His king, and performs kindness to His anointed; to David, and his offspring forever".

#### Total Victory

Throughout the generations, the Philistines were the bitter, formidable enemies of Israel. However, after David's wars with them we no longer hear of them. King David of Israel, alive and enduring, totally vanquished them, and the land rested from them for four hundred years. May it be God's will that our soldiers fight with valor, ingenuity, and professionalism, and with God's help, our brave soldiers' strike the enemy a crushing blow, resounding throughout the world. So all earth's inhabitants will know the words of the Bible are being fulfilled, the People of Israel are returning to their Land, and all who support them are blessed, while those who rise against them, are cursed.

#### Awakening to Repentance amidst War

This war began on Simchat Torah which fell on Shabbat. On account of this, it is incumbent upon us to awaken in regards to two fundamental, interconnected matters: 1. to strengthen the observance of Torah study on Shabbatot and Holidays. 2. To understand the blessing contained in Torah study, and rejoice in it.

More specifically: Our Sages said:

"The Sabbaths and Holidays were given to Israel in order that they might study Torah" (Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat 15:3). Meaning, one should divide Shabbat and Holiday time – half for Torah study, and half for Shabbat pleasure of meals and family (Pesachim 68b). It is impossible to describe the tremendous importance of Torah study on Shabbatot and Holidays, through which enlightenment, guidance and blessing flows to all the deeds we perform on weekdays. Understanding this, one rejoices in study with exceptional joy.

As our Sages said:

"God said to Israel: "My children, did I not write to you in My Torah 'Let not this book of the Torah cease from your mouths, but recite it day and night'? (Joshua 1:8). Even though you labor for six days, you shall dedicate Shabbat to Torah alone. Therefore they said, a person should always rise early and study on Shabbat, and go to the synagogue and study hall, read the Torah and study the Prophets, and afterwards, go home, eat and drink, to fulfill that which is stated (Kohelet 9:7): 'Go, eat your bread joyfully, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart'" (Tana D'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah 1). Without Torah Study, Great Accusation Arises Against Settling the Land

Our Sages said:

"The Torah said to God: "Master of the Universe, when the Jews enter the land, this one will run to his vineyard and that one to his field; what will become of me?" God responded "I have a partner with whom I will pair you. Its name is Shabbat, on which they do not work, and thus can engross themselves in you" (Tur §290).

The accusation against Yishuv Ha'Aretz (settling the Land of Israel) is grave – seemingly, a continuation of the Sin of the Spies. However, conversely, if, God forbid, Israel abandons the Torah, their hold on the Land will weaken, until, heaven forbid, they could be exiled from it. As the prophet states: "Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and withered like a wilderness, without anyone passing through? And the Lord said: It is because they have forsaken My Torah, which I set before them, and have not hearkened to My voice, nor walked by it" (Jeremiah 9:11-12).

Even today, the claim arises – you are settling the Land, enlisting in the army, studying science, going to work, but what of the Torah?! And the only

response to this monumental question is: Shabbat and Holidays! The day on which we study the Torah of Eretz Yisrael. Just as illumination for the six weekdays extends from Shabbat, so too, the Torah study of Shabbat sheds light on Yishuv Ha'Aretz, military service, science study, and all aspects of work. Thereby, all labor, science, army service, and social and family life become elevated to the level of the Torah's sanctity, since they are guided by it.

#### Irresponsible Media

To our great dismay, even during such difficult times, we must painfully tell the truth: We have an irresponsible media. Many spokespeople in the media continue harming national unity and security. Exploiting the terrible agony of the families of the fallen and kidnapped, they spread cowardice. Instead of being awed by the spirit of volunteerism and heroism, and strengthening the desire for victory and morally justified vengeance it warrants, they find faults. When ground forces are putting their lives on the line, every responsible person must speak about only one topic – defeating the enemy, and saving the state!

#### The Fallen are Holy

Those who sacrifice themselves for the sanctification of God's name, attain the highest level beyond which there is none higher. In their death, for the sanctification of God's name, they transcend the individual framework within which every person exists, to the general level of Israel's sanctity, connecting to God, and becoming sanctified through His sanctity. Therefore, even though they die prematurely in this world, they live very much so in the entirely long World to Come, to the point that "No one can stand in their section" (Bava Batra 10b). In their merit, life in this world continues and intensifies, since through their life in this world, they merited becoming sanctified with supreme sanctity, revealing through this, the supreme point of sanctity in this world.

Even Jews who did not intend to sacrifice their lives, yet were killed merely for being Jewish, like those murdered in the Holocaust, and victims of terror attacks, are considered kedoshim (holy). For throughout the lengthy history, it became clear to all, that Israel embodies monotheistic faith, and by their very identification as Jews, they bear God's name, which the world's wicked desire to kill them for. Therefore, already in a person identifying as being Jewish, there is mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice), and anyone murdered for being Jewish, is considered like a soldier killed sanctifying God's name in the war of heroism for the continuity of the Jewish people. All the more so, regarding Jews living in Israel, and participating in its building, and all the more so, those who settled with mesirut nefesh in kibbutzim and communities near the border. Their bereaved families, who raised these holy souls – become sanctified with them.

#### Avenging Their Blood

Our Sages said: "If you sanctify My name, I too will sanctify My name through you..." (Sifra, Acharei Mot 8:13).

And so great is the sanctification of God's name accomplished through them, that already at the time they are killed, the revenge God will take against the wicked who killed them, is determined and accomplished. And since for God, past, present and future are seen as one, already when they are killed, there is an illumination of their sanctification of God's name in the Upper Worlds, and they already stand, as if resurrected. Therefore, when they die, God as it were, says: "Today, I am exalted through them in the eyes of the nations, deniers of the Torah. Today, I take revenge against their enemies. Today, through them, I revive the dead. I am Hashem, I am the faithful Judge to take revenge, and Trustworthy to reward".

#### Their Comfort in Israel's Redemption

Our Sages said God is responsible to avenge their blood, as it states: "He will execute justice upon the nations into a heap of corpses; He crushed the head on a great land" (Psalms 110:6). When Israel is deserving, with God's help, the revenge comes through the Israel Defense Forces. When Israel is undeserving, the revenge is delayed and comes through indirect ways, but it ultimately comes, and harshly.

Our Sages further said, that in the Upper Worlds, there is an appointed angel for every Jew murdered by non-Jews. He, as it were, inscribes their name on the garment of the Holy One blessed be He, and they will remain inscribed there, until God avenges their blood. And these holy souls do not consent to be comforted until Mashiach himself is revealed, and comes to comfort them. With him, lights and pleasures descend to gladden them, and angels dress them in garments of honor (based on Zohar 1:39:1, 41:1).

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from: YUTorah <office@yutorah.org>

date: Oct 19, 2023, 7:04 PM

Subject: YUTorah in Print for Noah

Virtue Ethics

**Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman**

**Was Noah an ethical person?**

While some commentaries find fault with Noah, it is hard to circumvent the explicit accolades that “Noah was a righteous person (ish tzadik) and perfect (tamim) in his generation” (Gen. 6:9). Even if we read “in his generation” like Rabbi Yohanan, limiting his greatness to that particular era (Sanhedrin 108a), these phrases are still high praises for Noah. The commentaries distinguish between the three terms, “person,” “righteous,” and “perfect,” providing us with a brief moral treatise, spotlighting Noah as an exemplar of virtue ethics.

Virtue ethics, an idea usually attributed to Aristotle, is an ethical theory which focuses on cultivating internal characteristics that lead us to act morally. In contrast to the theory that ethics is about following rules (deontology), or about obtaining the best outcomes (utilitarianism), virtue ethics emphasizes developing the internal motivation to do the right thing for the right reasons. While Jewish ethics contains a deontological element, reflected in the imperative to follow Jewish law, Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, following the lead of some 20th century Jewish philosophers, argues that there is also a strong thread of Jewish virtue ethics, particularly evident in the writings

of Rambam (“The Implications of a Jewish Virtue Ethic,” 2000). One resonant example is when Rambam writes that it is better to give a thousand individual coins to different poor people, rather than giving a thousand coins to one poor person (Commentary on the Mishna Avot 3:18). While a utilitarian may argue that the best outcome would be to substantively help one pauper, Rambam instead focuses on the character of the donor. The habit of giving, formed by the many smaller donations, will better cultivate the trait of magnanimity.

Noah’s virtue ethics are first reflected in the word *ish* (person). Abarbanel writes that *ish* indicates that Noah is someone of stature, having earned respect from his community. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes, “according to the remarks of our sages, the name *ish* is not lightly used in the Tanach.” If the term is used to describe someone, it means that he earned that title by proving his worth through refined character. For Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *ish* signifies a person with “daat,” or intellectual acumen (Darash Moshe, p. 4). One cannot be righteous or perfect, unless one also possesses practical wisdom.

Other commentaries point to Noah’s virtuous character by distinguishing between the terms “righteous” and “perfect.” For instance, Rabbeinu Bahya writes that being “righteous” refers to avoidance of immoral behavior and the performance of moral action, while being “perfect” indicates that Noah was internally virtuous. Noah did not just follow the rules, or make ethical decisions based on the best outcome, but acted based on virtue ethics. His morality was not just an external expression but was reflective of a pure heart and mind. Noah did not just perform acts of righteousness, but he was righteous.

In a time where we are suffering from the moral corruption and atrocities perpetrated by Hamas, we must respond by modeling virtue and embodying truth, justice, and righteousness.

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from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Oct 19, 2023, 7:01 PM

subject: **Tidbits for Parshas Noach in Memory of R' Meir Zlotowitz ztl**  
Parshas Noach • October 20th • 6 Cheshvan 5784

BeHaB begins this coming Monday, October 23rd. BeHaB is a series of three fast days on the Monday, Thursday and subsequent Monday following the months of Tishrei and Nissan (BeHaB is an acronym for Beis (Monday), Hei (Thursday), Beis (Monday)). A Mi Shebeirach is recited before Mussaf this Shabbos for those who fast on these days. Many congregations recite Selichos on these days. The reasons given for BeHaB include: 1) to atone for any sins that one may have committed over Yom Tov; 2) to atone for work performed over Chol Hamoed; or 3) to strengthen the health of the body in anticipation of the change of season.

In Eretz Yisrael, V’sein Tal u’Matar is added to Bareich Aleinu starting at Maariv, Motzaei Shabbos, 7 Cheshvan/October 21st. Chutz La’Aretz will begin at Maariv on Tuesday night, December 5th. Someone traveling to or from Eretz Yisrael should seek halachic guidance.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levanah in the USA is Motzaei Shabbos, October 28th.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Kiddushin 68 • Yerushalmi: Shevi’is 13 • Mishnah Yomis: Chagiga 1:2-3 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 21a-23b Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn’t speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

The series of days of BeHaB begin on Monday, October 23rd. NOACH: Noah is righteous • Building the Teivah and gathering animals • Noah is six hundred years old when the great flood begins • Noah and family enter the Teivah • Rains fall and waters rise from the depths for forty days, covering the mountains • Everything on land is obliterated • The waters roil for 150 days, then begin to recede • The Teivah comes to rest on the Ararat mountains • The raven is sent from the Teivah • The dove is sent out twice, bringing back an olive leaf the second time • The dove is sent out a third time, and it does not return • Noah and family leave the Teivah • Noah offers sacrifices • Hashem promises to never again bring a flood • Noah and his children are now permitted to eat meat • The sign of the rainbow • Noah’s planting of a vineyard and subsequent denigration • Canaan is cursed • The descendants of Noah’s 3 children - 70 nations fill the earth • The tower of Bavel • Ten generations from Noah to Avram Haftarah: The haftarah (Yeshaya 54:1-55:5) cites Hashem’s promise to never again punish the world’s sins by a complete Mabul-like devastation.

Parshas Noach: 146 Pesukim • No Taryag Mitzvos listed

The Mabul is referred to as Mei Noah, the “waters of Noah” (Yeshayahu 54:9). As Noah, in fact, was a righteous individual who was spared from this great punishment, why is his name invoked in the name of this great tragedy?

Rav Meir Zlotowitz z”l would explain: The Zohar describes the contrast between Noah and Moshe Rabbeinu. Regarding Moshe, the Pasuk refers to the salvation of Krias Yam Suf as Moshe’s accomplishment. This is due to Moshe constantly interceding on behalf of the Bnei Yisrael, going so far as to offer his own life and destiny to save Klal Yisrael from destruction. In contrast, Noah failed to beseech Hashem to have mercy on mankind and save them from obliteration. Because of this failure, this tragic event is referred to as “Noah’s waters”. Even if the situation of a fellow man seems beyond hope, one should never fail to beseech our Father in Heaven on behalf of his fellow brethren, who are all Hashem’s children.

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**Rabbi Frand on the Parashah 3 -- Growing & Building Parshas Noach**

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמיד היה בדורותיו את האלקים הטהර נח

These are the offspring of Noach — Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d (6:9).

In the opening pasuk [verse] of our parsha, the name Noach is mentioned three times: "These are the offspring of Noach — Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d." [Bereishis 6:9]. The Medrash Tanchuma takes note of this strange sentence structure and comments that the pasuk alludes to the fact that Noach is an individual who had the distinction of seeing three different worlds: He saw the world when it was settled; he saw the world when it was destroyed; and he saw the world when it was settled once again.

Rav Simcha Wasserman expressed the thought that anyone who lived in Europe before the Holocaust, who lived through the Holocaust, and then merited to come out of the Holocaust and settle either in the United States or in the Land of Israel may also say about himself that he saw three worlds: He saw a settled world, a world in destruction, and a world once again settled. To have seen Europe in its final days of Jewish glory — the great Yeshivos, the great Jewish communities that existed there — this was to see a "settled world". To have witnessed what Rav Simcha witnessed, including the death of his father, Rav Elchonon Wasserman (may Hashem revenge his blood) at the hands of the Nazis and to have seen the desolation and destruction that he witnessed was to have seen a world in destruction. To have then come to the United States and settle in Los Angeles California and try to build Torah there and to have then resettled in Eretz Yisrael and have established a Yeshiva there too — he saw a world resettled once again.

Rav Simcha Wasserman commented that he learned in the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe. Telshe was in Lithuania, which is very far North. In the summer the days are extremely long and the nights are extremely short. He remembers walking in the city of Telshe in the summer time and he looked to the North and saw a sky that was pitch black and full of stars. As he looked to the southwest he saw a beautiful red sky in which the sun was just beginning to set. As he looked to the East he could already see the rays of light before the moments of dawn. On one day, in one moment, he saw a sunset, he saw pitch darkness, and he saw the beginning of another sunrise. This memory became the metaphor for him of what he witnessed later in his life. He witnessed the sun setting on the European Jewish community; he witnessed its darkest night; and he witnessed the new sunrise that occurred after the war. This thought does not only apply to Rav Simcha Wasserman, but to all Jews whose lives spanned World War II.

Rav Simcha Wasserman continued his comments by quoting a pasuk at the end of Parshas Noach: "And Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself (vaYachel Noach) and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk..." [Bereishis 9:20-21]. The Sages criticize Noach for planting a vineyard as his first act of planting after the Flood. "He should have involved himself in other types of planting." This act made him somewhat pedestrian (vaYachel comes from the same root as chullin = mundane).

Rav Simcha Wasserman commented, what do you want from this fellow? The man literally just saw the destruction of the world! He came out of the Ark to find a totally desolate world. It is understandable in those circumstances that a person should be depressed. It is also understandable that a person would want to deal with his depression. In those days, the way one dealt with depression was "Give wine to those bitter of spirit" [Mishlei 31:6]

The answer is that the Torah does not say that Noach became a wicked person. He did not do something bad or evil. It was understandable. But the Torah comments that he made himself "chullin" [mundane, pedestrian]. If a person has seen an entire world destroyed and he merits to be among the very few who are saved, there is no time for depression or to worry about one's own emotions. Such a person has a job to do. He must rebuild, pick up, and start over.

There are some situations in life where a person does not have the luxury to think about himself. In such circumstances a person cannot wallow in his sadness and depression. The person must deal with it: If the Almighty picked

me and saved me from among all those who did not make it, it must be because the Almighty wants me to do something with my life.

Such was the philosophy of Rav Simcha Wasserman. He saw his father and his father's entire Yeshiva in Baronovich destroyed, but he came out of the Holocaust, dusted himself off so to speak and became a disseminator of Torah in his own right. He not only preached the above thought, but he practiced what he preached. It is because of the amazing strength of character of individuals like himself and like the Roshei Yeshiva and the Chassidic leaders who were saved and came over to America and started over, rather than wallowing in their depression that we now are the recipients of their contributions and can enjoy the fruits of a spiritual world that is once again blossoming.

#### Noach Had Children Late In Life

The pasuk at the end of Parshas Bereishis [5:32] says: "And Noach was 500 years old and he gave birth to Shem, Cham, and Yafes". Rashi asks why others of Noach's generation gave birth to children at the age of 100 on average while Noach did not have any children until much later in life. Rashi answers that G-d did Noach a favor, so to speak. If he had children at a normal age and they turned out to be wicked, G-d would have had to kill them out with the rest of their generation. If, on the other hand, they were righteous, then by the time of the Flood they in turn would have already had several generations of descendants and Noach would need to build several Arks to house all his descendants. Therefore, Noach's children were born close in time to the Flood, such that Noach's oldest son was not yet a "bar onshin" [at the age when he would be subject to Heavenly punishment] when the decree concerning the Flood was issued.

Let us put ourselves in Noach's shoes for a minute. Noach was the greatest Tzadik in his generation. Everyone else was having children and grandchildren. Noach was infertile and childless. Where is there justice in this world? Noach must have had such thoughts for 400 years! He must have been asking himself "What does G-d have against me? What does he want from me? Why is he doing this to me? I am the most righteous person of my generation!"

The answer is that the Almighty has His calculations. He knew that there would be a Flood and everyone would be destroyed. He knew that it was best for Noach that he not have children for those 400 years. So the Almighty does Noach a favor and makes him infertile.

Our own perceived misfortunes are one of the hardest things for any of us to understand. We are limited by time and space and can only see what is happening in front of our eyes. There are times when we can't believe the things that happen to us and we perceive them as the greatest punishment. We must have this bedrock faith, which is so much easier to preach than to integrate into our psyche. This is the true Jewish outlook on life. If we could all know what the Almighty has in mind for us, we would understand that G-d is not doing us a disservice, but He is doing us the greatest favor!

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Noach are provided below:

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from: [contact@michalhorowitz.com](mailto:contact@michalhorowitz.com) date: Oct 18, 2023, 11:01 AM

Parshas Noach: A Window You Shall Make for the Ark

By **Michal Horowitz**

We are all familiar with the narrative that unfolds in this week's parsha, Parshas Noach. It had been ten generations since Adam and Creation, and all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. G-d decided it was necessary to destroy all life forms — from man to animal — and even the three teafachim of top soil were washed away and destroyed in the deluge.

The only human survivors of the flood were Noach and his wife Naama, their three sons, Shem, Cham and Yafes, and the wives of their sons. As for the animals, any animals that were in the ark survived, as well as all the fish in the sea (Rashi to 7:22).

Before the flood began, Hashem gave Noach precise instructions as to how to build the Ark. It was to have three floors – the top for the people, the middle for the animals, and the bottom for the garbage. The roof was to be sloped so the rain would run off it and down. Included in the instructions to build the Ark, Noach was commanded: **תְּצַהַר תְּצַהַר לְתָבָח** – a tzohar you shall make for the Ark (Bereishis 6:16).

What was the tzohar that Noach was to construct? Quoting Medrash Bereishis Rabbah, Rashi offers two opinions:

**תְּצַהַר יְמִינָךְ וְתְּצַהַר נְאָרָה לְדָם**

There are those who say the tzohar was a window, and there are those who say it was a precious gem that gave illumination for them.

As they were in the Ark for an entire year, and the world was inundated with water and darkness, we understand the second opinion of Rashi: **אָגָן תְּצַהַר נְאָרָה לְדָם**. The tzohar was a precious stone or gem that illuminated the Ark for them.

(This too is somewhat difficult to understand. We might wonder; how could one stone illuminate the entire Ark and provide enough light for all of its inhabitants? However, certainly Hashem could make a neis and the entire Ark would be illuminated from one stone. Once the stone was up and Noach's hishtadlus was done, from that one stone – much light would shine forth [It is not lost on me as I type these words that from our massive outpouring of national hishtadlus, Hashem can make many great miracles and much light can and will shine].)

However, according to the first opinion quoted by Rashi, **תְּצַהַר יְמִינָךְ**, that the tzohar was a window – for what did the eight people in the Ark need a window? It was storming, the world was full of destruction, there were the rain waters pouring down from above, the waters of the deep rising from below, destruction at every moment floating all around and over the Ark... What purpose would a window serve the Ark's inhabitants?

One answer remains as important for Noach in his time as it is for us, each individual in Am Yisrael, today. When the world around is storming, one may not ensconce him or herself in a protective cocoon without a window to the destruction happening outside, all around. It is morally reprehensible and against the Torah to say, "I am safe (or live under the illusion of safety, for today, no Jew anywhere in the world is safe), I am protected, I have my secure Ark which will keep me warm, dry, and protected, and hence, I can close my ears, my eyes, my heart, my mind and my life to the destruction around me."

When the world is storming – when our nation is fighting for her Land and Home! – when our soldiers are stationed at the southern and northern borders (at the time of this writing), when one hundred and ninety-nine captives are confirmed held in Gaza – including babies, elderly and disabled – when thousands of our brothers and sisters have lost their lives, and so many are bereaved, R"l, it is criminal to close our "windows", to live with the (false) illusion of safety, and to shut our hearts, minds and prayers to their plight! When one member of Israel is suffering, the entire Israel suffers along – **הַנְּאָרָה תְּצַהַר אֲשֶׁר שָׁרָף כָּל־בָּיתָ יְהוָה** (Vayikra 10:6). A window you shall make for the ark.

Israel Prize laureate and presidential candidate **Miriam Peretz**, who lost two of her sons (Uriel and Eliraz HY"D) during their service in the IDF, has paid condolence visits to over 30 families who lost loved ones in Hamas' recent barbaric attacks on Israel.

Speaking with Kan Reshet Bet, Peretz said, "Every morning, I have terrible lists, I did not ever think that I would have binders of names. One after the other, I go from morning to night between bereaved families all across Israel... we need all the help. Yesterday I went to fourteen families, people who I don't know."

Peretz also noted that there are families who are surrounded by thousands of visitors, and there are those who have only a few. She recalled that there was

one mother who called her and asked her to come, because she was already standing on the porch. "Many times they need to hear that their sons and daughters who fell, fell not because they ran to battle but because they wanted to live. The greatest comfort is that we live," she said.

"When a grandmother tells me, 'I won't make kuba any more,' I embrace her and show her the rest of the siblings and tell her, 'What about them? You won't make kuba for them?' And then the grandmother says, 'No, no, for them, I'll make it.'

"There are no bereaved families here – there is a bereaved country," she emphasized. (<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/378588>)

**תְּצַהַר תְּצַהַר לְתָבָח** – there are those who say a precious gem and there are those who say a window.

הכוהבת בבכי, בברכת ישועה ונחמות, ה' ירידם עליינו ועל ארצינו,  
Michal

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <[ravadlerstein@torah.org](mailto:ravadlerstein@torah.org)>

Ksav Sofer

**By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein**

**Parshas Noach Grand Larceny**

Hashem said in His heart: "I will not continue to curse the land because of Man...nor will I again continue to smite every living being as I have done."<sup>[1]</sup>

That's a relief, even if it is a bit unexpected. Why would G-d want to limit Himself in this way? He had good reason to act the way He did. The same circumstances could conceivably arise in the future. Wouldn't the same punishment fit comparable crimes? Hashem's statement itself seems upside-down. He places punishment of the earth ahead of smiting Man. Shouldn't it be the other way around? The earth was only obliterated because of Man's sins. If Hashem pledges never to punish Man in the same way in the future, then there will be no need to punish the earth. Man's sin is the cause; wiping out the earth is the effect.

Or maybe not. Let's remember what Ramban<sup>[2]</sup> writes about Adam's menu. Originally, he was to eat only the seeds of plants, and the fruit of trees. Meat was forbidden to him, because animals bear some resemblance to Man, and it was not appropriate to destroy souls that show some similarity to ours. Man surely was greater than the animals, but that greatness was not so a priori, and not to be celebrated. The mabul changed the equation. Noach was responsible for saving all animal life, by taking the animals along on the ark. All animals from then on owed their very existence to Man. It became appropriate from Man to make complete use of them. Now, let's look at the interim. As a consequence of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Man was told that he would be able to eat only by the sweat of his brow. In other words, he was effectively restricted even in his vegetarian diet. Whereas before the sin he could avail himself freely of things that grew on their own, this was no longer the case. His sin had reduced his stature. He could no longer see himself as so superior even to plants, that he could take them for granted. He had to earn his right to them through his toil.

Adam's progeny continued the decline, till they arrived at the generation of the Flood. By this time, they were so corrupt – so diminished and unentitled – that they lost their license to consume anything at all! Taking anything from this world would be a form of theft, similar to what Chazal say happens when any of us take pleasure without first reciting a berachah. On the scale of humanity as a whole, it would be grand larceny. Seen this way, mankind has to disappear not as a punishment, but because there was no appropriate way to sustain itself. All the sustenance Man needed was off-limits. Taking any food from the earth was unethical. "The earth was full of robbery"<sup>[3]</sup> does not mean only that they stole from each other, but that all of their ordinary eating was also theft!

A mankind that could not eat could not endure. G-d had no choice but to purge it from the face of the earth. And since the earth itself was created for Man, it, too had lost its purpose.

Noach's righteousness not only saved mankind, but created the license for him and his descendants to enjoy and utilize the world that he salvaged. This is the key to understanding what Hashem meant in our pasuk in speaking about sparing the world even before pledging not to destroy mankind. Having taken the burden of continuing world civilization on his shoulders, Noach's post-Flood world would forever be in his debt. His descendants would always possess some entitlement to enjoy its benefits. The "food chain" would never be fully disrupted for them, and therefore there would be no need to destroy the world or Man to prevent his taking what did not belong to him.

1. Bereishis 8:21 2. Bereishis 1:29 3. Bereishis 6:13 Ksav Sofer © 2023 by Torah.org.

## 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 TELEOLOGISTS**

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'mu'el 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 his 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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## 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	<b>Dor Ha-mabul</b>

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 <b>Mabul</b>
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 Noah	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 <b>aliya</b>	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	<b>Toldot shamayim va-aretz</b>
2->4	-> Man in (and out of) Gan Eden

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