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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 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**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!**

Mazel-Tov to Joy Sturm and Ken Drexler on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Jack Drexler this Shabbat at Beth Sholom Congregation. Mazel-Tov also to sister Mia, brother Adam, and grandfather Wally Sturm. The Drexler-Sturm family also honors grandparents Maxine Sturm, a"h, Alice Drexler, a"h, and Armand Drexler, z"l.

Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Ben and Nina Ehrenkranz and families on the birth last Sunday of a baby boy in London, England!

In Sefer Bereishis, the Torah frequently introduces a story of a key character by stating, "Ayleh toldot [name]" – these are the offspring of [name]. Parashat Noach starts, "Ayleh toldot Noach." One may understand this formula as indicating, "Here is the legacy of Noach." Noach's legacy consists of his mitzvot as much as of the accomplishments of his children and grandchildren (see Stone Chumash, note to 6:9-10, following Rashi). This formula makes sense even today. For each of us, our legacy consists of the good we accomplish during our lifetimes, and hopefully these mitzvot inspire our children and grandchildren to emulate our mitzvot.

According to the Torah, Noach was righteous, perfect in his generation (6:9). Torah commentators have debated whether this language means that Noach was a true tzadik or only a tzadik in comparison to others of his time (but would not have been considered so in comparison to Avraham). The ambivalence over how great Noach was comes largely because he spent 120 years building a tevah (Ark) yet ended up with no followers. When people would ask Noach what he was doing all that time, he would respond that he was building an Ark because God was going to destroy the world. It is unclear whether Noach's failure to attract any followers resulted from insufficient effort at trying to convert others or from the evil of his neighbors, none of whom was open to repenting and trying to build a relationship with Hashem.

God's original plan of creating a close relationship with man in His special home (Gan Eden) failed when Adam and Chava disobeyed Him and ate from God's special tree. They disobeyed the only restriction that God had placed on them in the garden, and then they tried to perform what is only God's role – to determine what is or should be good or evil. From the generation of Adam and Chava, successive generations became increasingly evil, until God concluded that the earth was evil in nature and needed to be recreated. God selected Noach and his family to be saved to populate a new world after He destroyed and recreated the earth. (As many commentators have discussed, God destroyed and then brought back the elements of the new world in the same order as in the original creation. Devrei Torah by Rabbis Eitan Mayer and Yitz Etshalom, attached by E-mail, explain this connection.)

After the flood, God told Noach and his sons to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the land (9:1). The next story in the Torah involves the people who left the East and settled in the plain of Shinar. These people rejected God's gift of rocks to build their houses. They invented bricks, mud based squares as hard as rocks – an arrogant attempt to make something superior to what God had given to them. When they decided to build a tower to call out and glorify themselves, God intervened by confusing their languages, to prevent them from ever greater sins. (For a chilling description of the kind of sin the Shinar society could have developed, see Rabbi Dov Linzer's Dvar Torah below.)

Rather than trying to develop an entire race of people with whom to develop a close relationship, God's next attempt focused on searching for a small group of people who would devote themselves to His mitzvot and set an example for other nations of how to develop closeness with God. This new formula involved Avraham, his family, and his followers. From the point when Avraham appears, the focus of the Torah switches from an overview of all people to Avraham and B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Yehoshua Singer's brilliant Dvar Torah, below, demonstrates how free will among future generations can destroy the positive intentions and mitzvot of even the most distinguished of our ancestors. Ashur, a descendent of Shem (as was Avraham), was righteous in his day, and left the evil of Shinar to found four new cities outside their influence. Unfortunately, two thousand years later, Assur's descendents in Assyria joined the other natiions devoted to destroying the Temple and B'Nai Yisrael. The Midrash discusses this decision of Ashur's descendents and concludes that they would be cursed from that time forward. May we who work hard to leave a legacy of mitzvot avoid having any descendents who similarly turn to evil and end up cursing our legacy.

Themes throughout the Torah tend to appear and reappear later. Rabbi Yishmael's thirteen rules of interpreting the Torah reflect this pattern. Rule two is that similar words in different contexts are meant to clarify each other. This rule will show on many occasions that concepts and mitzvot in the Torah often appear first in parshot Bereishis and Noach. For example, sibling rivalry, which we see first with Kayin and Hevel, returns in each generation of Avraham's family until we reach Manasseh and Ephraim, and then Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe – two generations in which siblings cooperated rather than fought. Also, Noach's apparent lack of attempts to convince his neighbors to repent contrasts with the repeated emphasis in the Torah and Navi on reaching out to others, especially the disadvantaged, including widows, orphans, and immigrants.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always looked for ways to make his congregants sensitive to the needs of those more disadvantaged than themselves. One reason why he especially enjoyed focusing on parshot focusing on mitzvot rather than stories was that the legalistic topics gave him more room to remind us of our obligations to improve the world for others and for those to come after our time. As Rabbi Cahan taught us, the Torah is for all times – and we live in a world with billions of people who deserve our efforts to make it a better world for all of us.

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Noach: The Rainmaker

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Noach lived through trying times to say the least. He survived not only a generation of spiritual chaos, but physical annihilation as well. However, Hashem walked with him and guided him. He instructed him every step of the way. He warned him of the impending flood. He instructed him to build an ark. He told him to bring all the animals to the ark. Yet Noach is labeled as a man who was lacking in faith. The Torah tells us that, "Noach with his wife and sons and his son's wives with him, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood" (Genesis 7:6).

Rashi quotes a Midrash which proclaims that Noach, to a small degree, lacked faith as he only entered the ark "because of the waters of the Flood." The implication is that Noach did not enter the ark until the rain forced him to.

The obvious question is how can we say that Noach lacked, even to a tiny extent, faith? He had to believe! After all, he spoke to Hashem! He built the ark! He gathered all the animals! He was the only one in his generation to worry about the impending doom! Surely, he must have believed! Why is there a complaint against Noach? What is wrong in waiting until he had no choice but to enter? To what degree is he considered lacking in faith?

Rabbi Shimshon Sherer, Rav of Congregation Kehilas Zichron Mordechai, tells the following story.

In a small town there was a severe drought. The community synagogues each prayed separately for rain, but to no avail. The tears and prayers failed to unlock the sealed heavens, and for months, no rains came.

Finally, the town's eldest sage held a meeting with prominent community rabbis and lay leaders. "There are two items lacking in our approach, faith and unity. Each one of you must impress upon his congregation the need to believe. If we are united and sincere, our prayers will be answered!" He declared that all the synagogues in the city would join together for a day of tefilah. Everyone, men women and children would join together for this event. "I assure you," he exclaimed, "that if we meet both criteria – faith and unity – no one will leave that prayer service without getting drenched!"

There was no shul large enough to contain the entire community so the date was set to gather and daven in a field! For the next few weeks all the rabbis spoke about bitachon and achdus (faith and unity). On the designated day the entire town gathered in a large field whose crops had long withered from the severe drought. Men, women, and children all gathered and anxiously awaited the old sage to begin the service.

The elderly rabbi walked up to the podium. His eyes scanned the tremendous crowd that filled the large field and then they dimmed in dismay. The rabbi began shaking his head in dissatisfaction. "This will never work," he moaned dejectedly. "The rain will not come." Slowly he left the podium. The other rabbis on the dais were shocked. "But rebbe everyone is here and they are all united! Surely they must believe that the rains will fall! Otherwise no one would have bothered to come on a working day!"

The rabbi shook his head slowly and sadly.

"No. They don't really believe," he stated. "I scanned the entire crowd. Nobody even brought a raincoat."

The level of faith that the Torah demanded from Noach would have had him bolt into the ark on the very morning that the Flood was meant to come. He had no inkling of the ferocity that was impending at the storm's first moments. Though it began as a light rainstorm his waiting until being forced by the torrents is equivalent to one who hears predictions of a tornado and stands outside waiting for the funnel to knock at his door. Noach should have moved himself and his family in the ark at zero hour without waiting for the rains to force him in. The instinctive faith should have kicked in turning the bright sunny day that he may have experienced into one that is filled with fatal flood water. But he waited to see if it would really come. And for that he is chided.

How often do we cancel plans or change a course of action on the say-so of the weatherman, but plan our activities so in contrast with the predictions of the Torah? Even Noach, who built the ark under intense pressure, is held accountable for the lack of instinctive faith that should have been interred in his bones. And on that level of faith, unfortunately, all of us are a little wet behind the ears.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5759-noach/

Parshat Noach: Why God Would Rather Just Have the Salad

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

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 parsha, 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/2021/10/parshat-noach-why-God-would-rather-just-have-the-salad/

Goodness, all day long!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

The generation of the Flood was in deep trouble. They had created a society steeped in theft, idol worship, and immorality. Hashem declared His intent to destroy them.

The description of the generation is remarkable: “Evil, all day long.” (6:5) We wonder, was their evil really “all day long?” Were there no times that they ate or slept, and kept themselves out of trouble?

When we explore the concept of life satisfaction, one of the things that we are on alert for is a person who eats to work, works to have a house to sleep, and repeats the cycle. If a person slips into that cycle there really is no motivator, no spark of joyous living. Instead, when striving for life satisfaction, we like to clarify a person’s values. The result is that everything the person does in life becomes an expression of those identified values.

To take a simple example, we can consider a hiker. Here is a person who loves to hike. He buys the right clothing and equipment, exercises daily in preparation for his next outing, and maintains just the right diet and sleep routine. Even his job schedule and social life gravitate around his love for hiking. Such a person lives the life of a hiker.

The generation of the Flood were not just committing wrongdoing. They made a culture of it. They were so steeped in theft, idols, and immorality, even their seemingly innocent time reflected their evil. Their recreation, sports, and entertainment were about new innovations in theft, idol worship, and immorality. They ate and slept to be ready for the next wrongdoing; they developed a culture that laughed about and celebrated such advances in creative wrongdoing. The Torah captures the generation well by saying “Evil, all day long.” Even the innocent time wasn’t so innocent.

This concept is invigorating. The same way that the generation of the Flood embodied evil such that even the neutral time was lived for evil, so we, who live for good, can have even the neutral time count to our credit. When our priorities are goodness, all of the neutral aspects of our lives such as working, sleeping, and eating, count as Mitzvos, because they are making the goodness possible.

Often, when I am coaching people on the topic of life satisfaction, I introduce them to an assignment tool called “The Wheel of Life.” The tool is a picture of a circle, divided into 8 parts, much like a pizza pie. Each “slice” has a box next to it and is to be labeled by the person with something that they consider a priority of life. Then, we color in the slice to the extent that they feel successful in this area. The result is a microcosm picture of the person’s life priorities, and an easy way to identify what areas are strong and what areas need to be worked on.

When people do this exercise, they usually identify the slices with such titles as, “Family, Career, Health, Recreation, Religion,” and so on. Recently, a gentleman I was coaching chose to title one of the slices “Torah,” and as he proceeded to title the other slices, he turned to me in confusion. “I don’t understand how this works,” he wondered. “Every title I am choosing is really a part of Torah. It is a Mitzvah to have family, to make an honest living, to treasure the gift of life that Hashem gave us and strive to be healthy.”

I smiled and explained that he was totally correct. All aspects of a Torah Jew’s life are Mitzvos and are an expression of Torah. “If you wish to put Torah as one of the titles,” I suggested, “You should title it Torah study, so that it is focused on that particular aspect of Torah.”

The same way that the generation of the Flood lived lives that were “Evil, all day long,” our lives can be “Goodness, all day long.” If we see the goodness of Torah and Mitzvos as our life goals, and all that we do is to enable us to do that, then even the seemingly neutral and innocent parts of life are attributable to that mission.

Have a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org

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The Tower of Babel Revisited: Thoughts on Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The story of the Tower of Babel is generally described as an attempt by arrogant human beings to build a tower as a sign of rebellion against God. God punishes them by confusing their language and scattering them throughout the earth.

Yet, a consideration of the text may lead us to an entirely different explanation of the story. The Torah informs us that "the whole earth was of one language and of uniform words. It came to pass, as they migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there... And they said one to the other: Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top shall reach to the heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered all over the earth."

At first glance, the people in this story seem to be living in an ideal state. They all speak the same language, they are unified in word and thought. When they realize that the population was growing and scattering away from the main center, they decide to build their city with a tall tower and make a name for themselves so that they not end up scattered all over the earth. They thought that their tower would be visible even to those who moved away, thereby maintaining a central focus and a sense of unity among all the people.

According to this reading, what was their sin? Why did God come down and confuse their languages and cause the people to be scattered?

The story could be understood as a divine critique of a society where everyone speaks the same language and thinks the same thoughts. These are the qualities of a totalitarian system, where individuality is not valued and not tolerated. The leaders in the land of Shinar feared that they would lose control if people started to move away from their direct authority. Therefore, they decided to build a tall tower to remind everyone where the center of authority remained. Even if people moved away, they were to look to the tower and to the totalitarian control it symbolized.

God did not approve of this totalitarian and authoritarian model for society. He confused the languages and scattered the population. He wanted to foster a world with different ways of speaking and different ways of thinking; He wanted to foster individuality and personal responsibility. He wanted authority not to be centralized in one small clique, but dispersed among many individuals in many localities.

Diversity within humanity is a positive quality. It enables human beings to see things from different perspectives, to offer unique insights, to reflect their ideas in different languages and idioms. In the process, all of humanity is enriched. If we all spoke the same words and thought the same thoughts and were under the control of one small powerful group, humanity would be vastly impoverished culturally, spiritually and intellectually.

The great Israeli writer, S. Y. Agnon, noted in one of his short stories ("Between Two Towns"): "The good Lord created a vast world, with many people in it whom He scattered wide, giving each place its singular quality and endowing every man with singular wisdom. You leave home and meet people from another place, and your mind is expanded by what you hear."

The builders of the Tower of Babel were guilty of trying to stifle the individuality, freedom and creativity of humanity. This was a sin against humanity--and a sin against God's hopes for humanity.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/tower-babel-revisited-thoughts-parashat-noah

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and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Higher Education and Jewish Education: Knowledge is Power

by Dr. Peter Schotten, z"l *

About a decade ago, I noticed a blog post detailing harassment of Jewish students at an elite Ivy League women's college. Duty bound, I forwarded the story to dear friend, a long time alumnus of that school. At first, she was disbelieving. In time, she became irritated, then angry. Could this be the college she had attended? Yet what then seemed shocking, now seems almost routine. It has become common for Jewish students attending American institutions of high education to feel bullied, threatened, intimidated or silenced. What should be done? What can be done?

The current manifestation of anti-Jewish bias on American campuses is not the traditional disdain for Jews that had existed in higher education in an earlier time. Jewish quotas at elite educational institutions before World War II were rooted in a kind of country club anti-Jewish animus. Jews were pictured as pushy, foreign, untrustworthy or strangely alien. Their achievements and tenacity threatened the good-old-boy Protestant, white upper class ruling establishment. Hence, restrictions on the numbers of Jews admitted to ivy league colleges were often maintained and sometimes even openly pronounced. This prejudiced attitude toward Jews proved increasingly difficult to retain given the political progress toward increasing equality and justice evidenced in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. Fortunately, this form of anti-Jewish prejudice has become a relic of the past.

Today's higher education anti-Jewish animus is of a different stripe. It is fueled by the claim of injustice and oppression. That claim – sometimes subtle and sometimes overt – resounds all over campus. Classrooms have been increasingly dominated by professors who dogmatically condemn Israel (and usually only Israel, or only Israel and the United States). Although reasonable people can dispute the extent of overlap between anti-Israel and anti-Jewish bias, these attitudes are most certainly far more than distant cousins. Meanwhile, Pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli student groups such as BDS set the tone and fuel the political energy for campus politics. They are supported by top and often middle-level administrators, whose careers to some extent depend upon their evident and continuous commitment to social justice.

For Jewish students, it sometimes appears that there is no place to hide. Hillel and Chabad can provide sanctuaries, but these shelters are often insufficient to withstand the political storm outside. Jewish community is an affirmative response to opposition and harassment, but the Jewish establishment often do not always speak forcefully or directly enough to the accusation that Jews embody or support unjust causes. The question is: what else can be done to support the Jewish student who feels marginalized or attacked?

It is time, I suggest, for Jewish educators to help formulate a response to the charges of injustice and oppression frequently hurled against Jewish college students. These students need to possess a knowledge of the facts that accurately defines contemporary Jewish reality. The truth about how and where Jews live today – in Israel, in the United States and in the various nations of the world – constitutes essential present and past knowledge necessary to counter the narrative that Jews are responsible for the uniquely predatory and repressive actions of the world's single Jewish state.

Hebrew school education about Jews in the contemporary world most often focuses on two broad themes. The tragedy of the Holocaust is almost always taught and is often a centerpiece. Jewish catastrophe, unfortunately, has been a recurrent Jewish concern throughout history. The Holocaust raised the possibility of the eradication of Jewish life worldwide. The questions associated with it are endless. What malevolency can explain such a possibility? Why did it happen? Why was more not done to resist it? And how can an educator communicate to students of any age the incommunicable?

A second theme of Jewish education about today's world has to do with the founding and flourishing of Israel. The event's importance to Jewish life is self-evident. A possible end to the Diaspora is no small accomplishment. Furthermore, there are other reasons to celebrate this achievement. Israel's founding was a significant contributor to many Jews' sense of identity and pride worldwide. If the Holocaust made Jews victims by turning them into corpses, Israel's founding, survival and continuous independence constitutes an enduring source of comfort and satisfaction for many Jews today.

Unfortunately, these defining events in Jewish history prove largely irrelevant to the political battles waged upon today's campuses. Said more precisely, the Holocaust and Israel's founding do not provide the Jewish student sufficient self-knowledge and factual awareness to equip them to withstand the withering opposition they often encounter. Jewish students today gain little sympathy because of the Holocaust and past victimhood their people once experienced. For this generation of students (both Jewish and non-Jewish) who live their lives so much in the present, even the appropriate sense of that horror has been largely lost. For that reason, a person's understanding and relationship to the Holocaust today no longer constitutes a basic element of most Jewish students' sense of self-identity,

Regarding the founding and prospering of Israel, the situation is even worse. Israel may have been greatly admired in its founding but now that admiration is far from universal. As Joshua Muravchik put it in a well-known book title, with the passage of time David somehow became Goliath. With growing power has come increased censure. Condemnation of Israel has become the focal point of much modern day anti-Judaism, particularly on college campuses. Increasingly, Jews are not identified with the positive achievements of a small, determined democratic nation but rather with an imperialist, racist state that deserves condemnation. In short, Jews are accused of supporting and governing a fundamentally immoral country.

That Jews have been the unique object of total extermination, or that Israel was founded on noble ideals, does not do much to address or settle the current rounds of anti-Israeli criticism. The essence of that criticism is reflected in the application of a phrase repeated endlessly today. The phrase is diversity, inclusion and equity. The mantra is repeated endlessly by politicians, by human resource department heads of major corporations and by big media. Its effect is almost hypnotic. It is a shorthand formulation of how one achieves egalitarian justice. The inclusive and diverse workplace is the ideal workplace. The nation that has achieved true diversity and inclusion is both tolerant and fair. This term even has replaced the traditional American standard for good government. As stated in the Declaration of Independence, legitimate government had traditionally been defined as an entity that secures citizens' rights and governs according to their consent. Essentially, it proclaims that citizens are free to make their way in the world and pursue their own course and their own happiness. The new standard is more radical, often prescribing outcomes rather than liberties. Also, it is important to recognize that diversity, inclusion and equity are both goals and standards. Their achievement is important, perhaps necessary. Governments and organizations must be held accountable.

Admittedly, such standards are controversial and open to all sorts of objections. But that is a different set of arguments deserving extended consideration elsewhere. For now, the important point to realize is that this mindset has been taught to this generation of college students. Increasingly, it has become the lens through which they evaluate social reality. When looking at an Israel governed and supported by Jews, many will inevitably ask: Is it diverse? Is it inclusive? Does the society produce equitable results for all its citizens? In other words, should I support or oppose it? A good number of these students will not be hard core opponents of the Jewish state. Rather, they are likely to be open-minded and genuinely undecided, asking questions and seeking answers. Jews – and Jewish students -- must be better prepared to engage them. The stakes are high.

Examining Israel and contemporary Jewish life worldwide from this perspective will, I think, persuasively and objectively refute many of the harshest charges levied against Israel while correcting misperceptions about Jews and about Israel's moral status in the world. It is important to understand to the extent such a teaching will supplement – rather than replace – different peoples' rationales for Israel's legitimacy and for protecting the fundamental human rights of Jews everywhere. Nothing in this educational approach necessarily contradicts or negates deeply held positive beliefs about Israel or Jews. One can still believe that Jews' claim to Israel is divinely ordained or historically determined. Or, alternatively, a person can still defend Israel's founding and policies according to the precepts of international law. Nor is the conviction that Jews everywhere are entitled to fundamental rights and decent treatment undermined by applying broad applied diversity and inclusion standards. As long as equity is understood as fundamental fairness, and not strict numerical representation, any diversity and inclusion discussion should prove non-threatening.

The obvious advantage of this sort of education is that it arms Jewish students in their confrontation with campus critics. But there is another, more subtle benefit to be gained from such an educational approach. The study of diversity and inclusion – in Israel and around the world – is rooted in practice. It focuses upon what nations actually do and how people live and have lived and how they have been treated. What can we expect and observe about how diversity and inclusion actually functions in the world? This real world emphasis avoids a common failure of much academic theory, which tends to adopt utopian standards and programs and then selectively apply them to disfavored policies or nations.

Finally, a word about definitions. The discussion of diversity and inclusiveness are here couched in their most popular and appealing sense (as they seem to an idealistic student). Diversity simply means being understanding of cultural, racial and other differences. It suggests, in other words, that a person is open, non-prejudiced and tolerant. Inclusion implies that no one is to be denied respect or opportunity. Equity, as we already noted, means fairness and due process. Therefore, American law and politics equity often is taken to mean the strict representation of groups regarding the distribution of rewards (and penalties). That is not the way the term is used here.

We are also concerned that these terms, once so defined, be applied consistently, holding all nations and peoples to similar standards. Such a requirement is important because of the emotional and seemingly semi-hypnotic response yielded by these ideas. Fashioned into a negative critique applied against the Jewish state, these terms can take the form of a radical indictment. When this occurs, Israel stands accused of imperialism, apartheid, racial and religious bigotry and sometimes even genocide. These are among the most grievous violations of the diversity, inclusion and equity standard imaginable. BDS and related organizations repeat such charges endlessly and these accusations are today commonly echoed on college campuses.

Jewish education needs to address this critique head on, before Jewish students pursue higher education. So far, this has not been done effectively. What is required is a curriculum, or perhaps at least a class, that addresses these concerns by describing the ways Jews actually live in the world today. Their actions and practices need to be seen in an international and historical context. And, of course, as was previously noted, consistent moral standards need to be applied.

What would such a course of study look like? No doubt, its creation represents a challenge to leading Jewish educators. What follows is one possible formulation. It represents a very brief and sketchy outline of what such an education might look like:

Course of Study: Diversity, Inclusion and Judaism: Then and Now

Part I: Overview. Three points need to be made here. First, terms like diversity and inclusion are contemporary reformulations of traditionally important concepts in western thought and within Judaism, namely the equal dignity of all human beings. Second, while often proclaimed, the actual achievement of these goals throughout history has proven elusive. Failure has been the rule, success the exception. Third, Jews have suffered particularly because of this failure. Anti-Judaism (i. e.. anti-Semitism) remains an enduring legacy. As Robert Goldwin has written, "Jews had suffered persecution almost everywhere in the world for Millennia." Continuing, he observes, "they have been beaten, tortured, murdered, and hounded from country to country and even from continent to continent."

Part II: Jews in the United States. First, demographically and statistically, what do we know about Jews and contemporary Jewish life in America? What (geographic, cultural, political , etc.) differences and similarities characterize the lives of Jewish citizens (e. g. Reform, Orthodox and secular Jews)? What about the relationship between Jews and non-Jews? (The issue of assimilation could be considered here). Finally, what social, economic or political trends are today noteworthy? (The current spate of attacks on Jews might be mentioned.)

Second, what is the legal and political structure of the United States in respect to Jews? At the time of the Constitution's adoption, Jewish life in the states was surprisingly tolerant by contemporary-worldwide standards. Yet Jews (and interestingly Catholics in Protestant states and Protestants in Catholic states) were not treated equally at the time of the Constitution's writing. In many, there existed state churches, religious tests and other discriminatory practices. By contrast, the United States Constitution prohibited such religious oaths in the newly created government, a remarkable but much overlooked guarantee protecting freedom of conscience. In time, the two religion clauses of the First Amendment also became important protections of the right of Jews in the United States to practice their religion.

Part III: Jews in Israel. The creation of the modern state of Israel needs to be described. Also the ethnic, racial and ethnic (and even religious) differences among Israeli Jews need to be explained. Particular emphasis should be placed between the different Mizrahi/Sephardic and West European origins of the Israeli people. Jewish emigration – especially from Russia and Ethiopia – might be highlighted. Various religious movements among practicing Jews and secular Jews will also need to be recounted. This diversity within Judaism and among Jews points to a different kind of diversity: that between Jews and non-Jews who are Israeli citizens. Most predominantly, these include Christians, Druze and Arab Muslims. This two part analysis should refute the too popular stereotype that Israel is a monolithic nation. Rather, pointing to the multiple diversities that characterize Israel today raises the following question: given this great amount of

diversity, how does a successful nation-state like Israel try to provide for inclusion? Contemporary issues and challenges could be discussed and analyzed here.

Next, there exists the need to the explain Israel's political and legal system and structure as a continuing effort to reconcile diversity and inclusion – in other words, to attempt the creation of a single community out of its many disparate parts. Also this would be an appropriate place to describe and analyze the recent debate within Israel regarding the appropriateness of declaring itself to be a Jewish state.

Part IV: Jews in Arab Lands. The number of Jews living in Middle Eastern Arab land has declined precipitously [since] mid-twentieth century. In some nations, almost all traces of Jews and Judaism have been eradicated, a phenomenon explained in detail by authors such as Bernard Lewis and Lyn Julius. The contrast between the Israeli attempt to accommodate and integrate its Arab population and these Arab states' persecution of their Jewish residents is striking. The difference is highly significant and has been underappreciated, particularly by Jewish students. An interesting example is what is now essentially a Jewish-free Egypt and the collapse of political influence and sheer numbers during the 20th century.

A short examination of why this happened – particularly an analysis of social, political and religious influences within Arab Middle East nations – could help explain how and why Jewish life and influence vanished from many of these countries.

Part V: Jews in European Nations. The pre and post Holocaust history of the treatment of Jewish populations in various European nations help provide a more rounded and complete picture of Jews' battle for respect and inclusion – first in a Christian society and then in the modern secular state. Special emphasis upon England, Germany and France should be given. Social and economic influences prove particularly important. The resurgence of left and right wing anti-Judaism today should be pointed out. Governmental and legal responses (such as the passage of hate crime legislation) could be explained and examined.

Part VI: Jews Elsewhere: Here there is room for a variety of Jewish experiences throughout the world. For example, the Jewish immigration to Shanghai might be contrasted with the history of Jews in Ethiopia to give some idea of the rich and diverse history of Jews throughout the world and through time. Although such a topic may seem remote to American students, there exists a wealth of information and research that can serve as a basis for an intelligent and illuminating discussion of the many variants of Jewish life.

Part VII: What is a Jew? Even the question of who is Jewish is a profound and perplexing. What is a Jew asked Rabbi Morris Kertzer some seventy years ago, hardly raising a new question. Is Judaism primarily a matter of birth? If so, what or who counts? Is having a Jewish mother or at least one Jewish parent essential? If one chooses to consider oneself Jewish, is it merely a matter of self-definition or must the affiliation be formalized. If so, how? Who exactly are the Jews? Certainly not a race. But perhaps, to some extent, one or several ethnic identities. Or maybe what is special about Jews is that they so strongly identify with the land (Israel)? Could it be that they are a people? If so, what constitutes their peoplehood? Is it shared historical experiences or shared books? Or is it a belief in a single God or perhaps in revelation itself? If so, what do we make of those who declare themselves Jewish atheists? Was Spinoza really a Jewish thinker? What about Karl Marx? Is Woody Allen a Jewish comedian? What is significant about this question of Jewish identity is its complexity. Its many nuances speak to an important kind of diversity within Jewish thought itself. And it stands in sharp contrast to the recurrent anti-Jewish caricature of "The Jew".

This vile image of the Jew – or something akin to it – has not gone away in our time. Its strangest – and perhaps one of its most frightening aspects – is its emergence full blown on American college campuses. The evil Jew -- manifested most fully by allegedly imperialist, racist, colonial Israel, has today become little more than a vile campus cliché. Many older American Jews find the situation shocking. Most Jewish students – to the extent they embrace their identity – are woefully unprepared to confront this challenge. That needs to change. It is both a challenge and a task for Jewish education and Jewish educators. Presented for your consideration above is a bare outline of what such an effort might look like. It is a small first step. But, I hope, it is a step forward.

* Late Emeritus Professor of Government and International Affairs at Augustana University (Sioux Falls, South Dakota). Dr. Schotten submitted this article shortly before he bacame ill and passed away. Dr. Schotten was Rabbi Angel's brother-in-law and an outstanding scholar.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/higher-education-and-jewish-education-knowledge-power

Set Your Sights

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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, who's 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.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Noach

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

[Rabbi Rube had a family emergency this week and hopes to resume sending his Devrei Torah next week.]

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Rav Kook Torah
Noah: Balancing the Universe

The Torah's revelation at Mount Sinai was such a momentous event, it was heard around the world:

"When the Torah was given to Israel, the sound reverberated from one end of the world to the other. In their palaces, the kings of all the nations were seized with fear.

> *They gathered around the wicked prophet Balaam and asked, 'What is this tremendous sound that we hear? Perhaps a flood is coming to the world!'*
>
> *Balaam replied, 'No, God has already sworn not to bring another flood.'*
>
> *'Maybe not a deluge of water, but destruction by fire?'*
>
> *'No, He already promised never to destroy all flesh.'*
>
> *'Then what is this tremendous sound that we hear?'*
>
> *'God has a precious gift [the Torah] safeguarded in His treasury... and He now wishes to bestow it to His children.'"* (Zevachim 116b)

How can the Midrash compare that extreme act of mass destruction — the Great Flood — to the most significant event in the history of humanity, the Revelation of the Torah? Why did the majestic sounds from Sinai bring back fearful memories of the Flood?

An Unbalanced Universe

God created the universe with a precise balance between its physical and spiritual aspects. According to the Midrash (Chagigah 12a), Adam was so tall, his height stretched from the earth all the way to the heavens. What does this mean?

The Sages were not concerned with Adam's physical height. This description of Adam is meant to express the careful equilibrium that existed between his physical and spiritual components. Adam stood between the earth and the heavens, reaching both in equal measure.

After the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, however, Adam disrupted this delicate balance. His transgression of God's command diminished his spiritual stature. Yet his physical qualities remained as powerful as before.

The Great Flood

Adam's descendants inherited his physical powers. They too lived remarkably long lives. And, like Adam, their spiritual strength was diluted. This imbalance between the physical and the spiritual led to a situation in which their intense physical desires overwhelmed their sense of morality and justice. "All flesh had perverted its way on the earth" (Gen. 6:12).

To correct this situation, God brought the Flood of Noah's generation. This catastrophic event greatly weakened the universe's material side. The flood waters washed away the top three handbreadths of soil (Rashi on Gen. 6:13). Humanity's physical strength was also greatly reduced, and people began living shorter lives.

The Rainbow

This insight also explains the covenant of the rainbow. Were there not rainbows before the Flood? How did the rainbow suddenly become a symbol of protection from Divine punishment?

In truth, the rainbow was created immediately before the Sabbath of creation (Avot 5:6). Before the Flood, however, the rainbow could not be seen. It was a Keshet Be'Anan, a rainbow in the clouds. The thickness and opacity of the clouds, a metaphor for the world's dense physicality, obscured the rainbow. Only after the Flood, in a world of diluted physical strength, did the rainbow finally become visible.

The rainbow is a symbol of weakness. Physical weakness, since the clouds no longer conceal it. And also spiritual weakness, in that only a Divine promise prevents the world's destruction as punishment for its sins. The Sages taught in Ketubot 77b that rare were the generations that merited tzaddikim so pure that no rainbow appeared in their days.1

The Flood and its aftermath restored the world's fundamental balance. In addition to weakening the material universe, God bolstered humanity's spiritual side with the Noahide Code of basic morality. The Flood annulled all previous obligations, and initiated a new era of repairing the world via the Seven Mitzvot of Bnei-Noah.

A Better Path to Realign the Universe

At Sinai, the world gained a second, superior path to maintain its delicate balance. The Torah provided a new way to repair and purify the world. It is for this reason that the Midrash compares the Flood to the Revelation at Sinai. Both events served to maintain the universe's equilibrium between the material and the spiritual.

The Midrash says that Balaam responded to the kings by quoting from Psalms, "God sat enthroned at the Flood... God will give strength [Torah] to His people" (Psalms 29:10-11). This verse compares the effect of the Flood to that of the Torah.

The path of Torah, however, is a superior one. Instead of destroying and weakening the physical world, the Torah builds and strengthens the spiritual. Thus the psalm refers to Torah as 'strength.' This is the true path of universal balance and harmony, as the psalm concludes, "God will bless his people with peace."

(Adapted from Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah 8, Noah 5690 (1929).)

FOOTNOTE:

1. The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant that "there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). Occasionally the world benefits from the presence of a tzaddik whose merits are so great that the world does not need to resort to the Covenant of the Rainbow.

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/NOAH64.htm

Noach (5774) – Righteousness is not Leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

Noah was a good man in a bad age. But his influence on the life of his contemporaries was, apparently, non-existent. That is implicit in God's statement, "You alone have I found righteous in this whole generation" (Gen. 7:1). It is implicit also in the fact that only Noah and his family, together with the animals, were saved. It is reasonable to assume that these two facts – Noah's righteousness and his lack of influence on his contemporaries – are intimately related. Noah preserved his virtue by separating himself from his environment. That is how, in a world gone mad, he stayed sane.

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

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

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

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

R. Ahab. R. Hanina said: Never did a favourable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following, where it is written, "And the Lord said unto him: Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are being done in the midst thereof" (Ezek. 9:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, "Go and set a mark of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them." Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Sovereign of the Universe! How are these different from those?" "Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked," He replied. "Sovereign of the Universe!" said Justice, "they had the power to protest but did not." Said God, "Had they protested, they would not have heeded them." "Sovereign of the Universe!" said Justice, "This was revealed to You, but was it revealed to them?" (Shabbat 55a)

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

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

This idea did not suddenly appear for the first time in the Talmud. It is stated explicitly in the book of Ezekiel. This is what God says to the Prophet:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTE:

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

* https://rabbisacks.org/noah-5774-righteousness-is-not-leadership/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

What Was Wrong With Noah? An Essay on Noach

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

Criticizing Noah

Rashi's comment on the first verse in the parshah – "Noah was a righteous man, pious in his generation"1 – is a bit puzzling: "Some interpret it to his credit…while others interpret it to his discredit." If the verse can be interpreted to Noah's credit, why would Rashi, echoing our sages, interpret it to his discredit?

Noah appears at the end of Parshat Bereishit as the world's great hope. The world is rife with criminals and thieves, and only one man exists who stands out in his generation: "But Noah found favor in G d's sight."2 Even Noah's name attests to this assessment: "This one will bring us relief (yenachamenu)."3 This is a child who is born amidst great hope. But Noah – despite all the praise, and although he spoke with G d and was close to Him – ultimately reaches a state in which his character is interpreted negatively.
It seems clear that this negative assessment of Noah cannot be completely negative, as it would be very difficult to claim that everything he did was bad. Rather, Noah can be seen as a negative character when held up to the standard of Abraham. In other words, when our sages interpreted Noah negatively, it was not so much to discredit him but to emphasize Abraham's worthiness.

Loneliness
As we analyze Noah's narrative arc, familiar elements begin to arise that evoke the narratives of other characters throughout Tanach. Noah starts out as a righteous and pious man, but the final episode of his narrative represents a radical departure from this image. To be sure, Noah is not entirely at fault in the ugly incident described in chapter 9, but some of the blame can certainly be placed on Noah and his drunkenness.

The character that immediately comes to mind when we read of Noah's fall from piety is Lot. Lot comes from a good family – he is Abraham's nephew – but his fall is similarly tragic. Lot did not personally commit any egregious sins; because of this it is difficult to blame him directly for the events that transpired as a result of his actions. However, the Torah conveys an air of unpleasantness surrounding Lot's poor decisions, and it is clear that our sages' variously negative assessment of Lot is merely an extension of a motif that already exists in the text.

There are additional points of resemblance between Noah and Lot. In both cases, their children were involved; both were enticed by wine, and their respective falls came about as a result of intoxication; and both were seemingly driven to drink in the wake of extraordinarily traumatic events. Noah and Lot are both survivors of bygone worlds, solitary individuals remaining from whole societies that disappeared in the blink of an eye. Everything that surrounded them is suddenly gone, and they are left isolated within themselves. Apparently, neither Noah nor Lot can bear the terrible loneliness, the feeling of being one of the only people left in the world. It should not be surprising that both of them, wallowing in loneliness, begin to drink.

The loneliness of Noah and Lot is a natural result of separation from the world. In fact, this is essentially the same loneliness that the tzaddik experiences, as one can only become a tzaddik if he is capable of being alone, able to countenance endless loneliness. A tzaddik must be willing to be like Abraham, of whom Ezekiel says, "Abraham was singular."4

Abraham wanted to change the world. But the moment he leaves his father's house, he also decides to be singular and alone, to be "Abram the Hebrew (HaIvri)"5 – that is, in a position where "the whole world stands on one side (ever) and he stands on the other side."6 Abraham's willingness to accept the loneliness of a tzaddik's task is part of what makes him the perfect tzaddik. Conversely, a person can be a truly exalted personality, but as long as he cannot exist without a community of supporters, he cannot be a true tzaddik.

In the book of Ezekiel, Daniel and Job appear together with Noah in the same verse.7 What the three have in common is that each of them had to begin his course by himself, all alone and without any support from others. An individual who follows such a path undertakes to be alone even where good company is available. He cannot truly connect with his father or mother, his brothers or sisters, or anyone else. Part of his essence is to be alone.

The tzaddik faces loneliness even when he is surrounded by his followers. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov comments on the notion of “Abraham was singular” that the tzaddik, even when he is surrounded by good people, must be ready for the loneliness and singularity that Noah and Abraham experienced8.

It is interesting to note that even people who lived in generations that, seemingly, were not at all sinful or degenerate still express the loneliness of one who longs to transcend his society. Take, for example, the book of Psalms. King David lives in neither a physical nor a cultural wilderness. Nor does he live in a place where everyone is wicked. But if we turn to chapter 69, we see that he speaks of terrible loneliness – everyone is mocking him, everyone is laughing. I imagine that a person in David’s situation today, thirsting for spiritual growth, would be admonished by his peers, “There is a limit to the fear of G d. Do you think you are better than the local rabbi? Do you think you are better than your friends? Know your place. Why do you have to be better than everyone else?”

This is what creates the sense of loneliness, and this is what David is complaining about. It is not about persecution but about a feeling of distance from his immediate circle or society. Even a fundamentally good society is not always interested in having a distinctive, exalted individual in its midst – even if that individual represents g-dliness and holiness.

Many of the prophets experienced this same loneliness as well. That Jeremiah was wretched and persecuted is understandable. He came from a small village of Priests, who presumably did not possess great wealth. When a young man without noble ancestry stood up and criticized the people, it was no wonder that they beat him and tormented him. But the same phenomenon occurs to another prophet who was seemingly born into opposite circumstances. Isaiah was King Uzziyahu’s cousin, and from the style of his book it is evident that he did not speak like a commoner but like a member of the aristocracy. He was also the only prophet whom G d did not have to push into accepting his mission; rather, Isaiah rushed to receive prophecy of his own accord – and yet even he says, “I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.”9

A person can follow a righteous path and be considered one “who acts charitably at all times,”10 as interpreted by our sages, “This refers to one who supports his sons and daughters.”11 One can also be a simple Jew, who plows in the plowing season, sows in the sowing season, and reaps in the reaping season, like an ordinary member of society. However, when one acts like a simple Jew, it becomes impossible to transcend this status, to ascend in holiness. There is an element of separation that is part of the essence of the tzaddik. For some, the justification for this separation is simple: I live in a hostile world, a world full of people who are totally different from me. In order to survive spiritually in such a world, it is necessary to separate from it to some extent. But even when a person lives in a world that he basically identifies with, a world that is populated by good, decent people, there, too, he must take care to incorporate an element of separation into his lifestyle and persona.

As we have stated, part of this problem is societal. Society does not like it when someone deviates from the norm – even if this deviation improves the society. It takes people a long time to accept someone who is better than them. Furthermore, some people harbor envy, hatred, and other emotions that act as obstacles to healthy relationships. But apart from dealing with the reaction of society, one must also face oneself. When an individual chooses to ascend toward G d, he naturally isolates himself – not as a reaction to society but because he now devotes himself to a more sublime form of contact.

In order for an individual to follow the path of a tzaddik, he must, at least to a certain extent, be detached and devoted to G d, and this is something that requires a kind of total dedication. One who is constantly enmeshed in his society can reach important achievements, but to reach the path of absolute truth requires the total disregard of other people’s opinions. To be excessively cognizant of the opinions of others represents a defect in a person’s willpower.

This concept applies to people living in any generation and, as we have seen, it is reflected in the Torah in the characters of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and many others.

“A tzaddik in peltz”

Ascending in holiness is not a simple matter. It involves an intrinsic danger, to which Noah fell prey. When one is occupied with a world that is entirely holy, he lives in it alone, and he is liable to forget that there are other people that exist in the world. When a person lives, grows, and develops alone, he may come to a point where he becomes unaware of the existence of others.

What does a tzaddik do when disaster strikes the world? He can respond in several ways. When Noah builds an ark, he opts for a very specific form of response. He explains to his neighbors that he is building an ark because G d is about to bring retribution. Noah does not hate them, Heaven forbid. However, the essence of his work is to build a shelter in which he and his small group will be able to escape and survive, so that no matter what happens, he will not be harmed. Noah is certainly righteous and pious, but he lacks the ability to speak with his contemporaries, who consider him crazy. He has withstood 120 years of their mockery of both him and his promised flood, so it stands to reason that he is sick of these people and their jokes. When he builds an ark, he is building a shelter for himself. He is willing, perhaps, to let in another several people, but, tellingly, not enough to form a complete minyan of ten people. This fits perfectly with Noah's persona: Such a man, by his very nature, is incapable of making a minyan. Noah did allow a few relatives to board the ark, but even in this he did not go too far: Only his wife and his children were invited.

Noah lets into the ark only the very best, only those he deems deserving of survival. All the rest he rejects, and they all perish – and yet he does let into the ark at least one son whose worthiness is highly questionable. This phenomenon is not so rare. Sometimes a clique of tzaddikim forms – four, five, eight tzaddikim who sit by themselves – and they let into their group a Ham or a Japheth, saying, mistakenly, "We are family, so we will surely get along."

There is a well-known saying that Noah was the first example of the Yiddish expression, "a tzaddik in peltz" – a tzaddik wearing a fur coat. What is a tzaddik in peltz? When the cold weather comes, there are two ways of dealing with it. One way is to turn on a heater; the other way is to wear a fur coat. The result for the individual is the same: Whether one turns on the heater or wears a fur coat, he will be warm enough and can continue to function. The difference is only regarding others. When one turns on the heater, others will enjoy the warmth as well, whereas when one wears a fur coat, the individual becomes warm, but the others remain cold.

The problem with Noah's ark was not that there was no need for an ark. There was certainly a need for an ark, as otherwise it would have been impossible to escape the Flood. But when Noah closed his ark so that others could not enter, that was an exceedingly problematic course of action.

Strangely and paradoxically, the very fact that Noah saved only himself and his family was what caused his family to become no more than ordinary. Noah's descendants are ordinary people of all types and kinds. There are ten generations from Adam to Noah, and ten more from Noah to Abraham, but no notable descendants issue from Noah. Noah says, "Before I attempt to educate other people's children, before I try to influence others, I should concern myself with my own children." As a result of Noah's inward-facing perspective, his children do not achieve anything of consequence. By contrast, Abraham, who constantly concerns himself with the children of others, is blessed with a litany of notable descendants. His children, for better or for worse, are distinctive characters in our tradition.

Love of G d – a passion?

Anyone who worships G d knows that there is an aspect of spiritual pleasure inherent in worship, as R. Sheshet says, "Rejoice, my soul, rejoice, my soul; for you have I read [the Torah], for you have I studied [the Mishna]."12 What could be better? We are not talking about contemptible people who derive physical benefits from their worship, but about pure spiritual pleasure.

Whether it is the act of getting up to pray or sitting down to study Torah, that moment has the potential to be the pinnacle of a person's worldly pleasure, unconnected to any concern about one's share in the World to Come. I was once the guest of a Jewish dairy farmer who lived on a kibbutz. He did physical labor for close to eight hours each day – and he was not a young man – and then he would bathe, have a small meal, and sit for between eight and nine hours studying Talmud. And whenever it was possible, he would study for another few hours after that. The fact that he studied bareheaded and that his home lacked a mezuzah had nothing to do with the simple pleasure he derived from connecting with G d through Torah study.

For the tzaddik, although solitude is one of his primary means of connection with G d, it can also be a form of egoism. Within this solitude is an aspect of pure selfishness: This individual is concerned only with himself. There are various levels of excessive solitude. For some, it manifests itself in the desire to eat alone. For others, it means studying Talmud alone. For still others, it is a desire to claim the entire "World to Come" for themselves. All of these cases are problematic, which raises the extremely serious question about people who engage in the service of G d: Could it be that the love of G d is a passion like all other passions? Could there be a person who is so preoccupied with his Creator that he cannot see his fellow men?

Three levels of tzaddikim

Needless to say, one does not necessarily have to isolate himself completely in order to be a tzaddik. The Torah mentions that on their journey to Canaan, Abram and Sarai took with them "the souls they had made in Charan."13 What is the meaning of this expression – how does one "make souls"? The Midrash explains, "Abraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women."14 Abraham and Sarah were only two people, but they were actively involved in redeeming the world, constantly engaging with and reaching out to others.

Broadly speaking, there are three levels of tzaddikim, each of which is considered praiseworthy in G d's eyes: the level of Noah, the level of Abraham, and perhaps an even higher level – that of Moses. Noah represents the tzaddik who looks after himself alone. Abraham represents the tzaddik who cannot tolerate being totally self-centered, for he feels the need to look after the world. Moses represents the highest level of righteousness. When G d wanted to isolate him from the People of Israel after they sinned, Moses refused. G d turns to him after the sin of the Golden Calf and relays to him the same message that Noah received: "You are a tzaddik; the entire generation is unworthy of surviving. You should survive, and a new world shall arise from you." Moses responds, "Blot me out from Your book".15 Not only does Moses assume great responsibility and concern himself with the world around him, but he says that he does not want to be the only tzaddik among all these people. If G d cannot forgive the entire generation, Moses will renounce even the personal relationship with G d that he had cultivated until that point.

The flood in every generation

The problem of the flood exists not just in the time of Noah. To be sure, G d promised that there would never again be such a flood of water, but as any good lawyer would point out, He never promised to desist from other floods. G d's promise is, in this respect, a carefully-termed legal clause, complete with limitations.

In fact, there is a flood in almost every generation. In some generations, the "flood" is physical; it may be a wildfire, a tsunami, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption. In other generations, the flood is not physical but spiritual. Just as a physical flood may involve water falling down from heaven or surging up from the sea, in a spiritual flood the intellectuals inundate us with anti-religious messages from above, and from below, the masses initiate a deluge of dissatisfaction with the religious experience.

Hence, the need arises to build an ark. For this reason, people gather together and safeguard themselves; they build for themselves walls so as not to drown in the ocean of water. On the other hand, the story of Noah should remind us that even someone who is saved from the flood can end up like a drunkard, leading an insular life even in spiritual matters; and then the world will have to wait another ten generations until someone comes along to save it.

Today, our modern "arks" are sometimes much larger than that of Noah. The ark may be the size of a neighborhood or even a whole city – containing within it countless tzaddikim, perhaps one Canaan, one Ham, and even one Shem with his house of study. Beyond that, as far as the ark's inhabitants are concerned, no other world exists. This contemporary spiritual isolation is a problem that requires attention.

Noah's narrative begins with "Noah found favor" and ends on a note of defeat – he is an old and lonely man, with nothing to show for his life's achievements and struggles. Ultimately, the world's "second draft" ends in failure, just as the "first draft" did. G d finished creating the world and beheld that "it was very good,"16 but shortly thereafter Parshat Bereishit concludes, "and He grieved in his heart."17

Only later on comes the story of Abraham, the man who is capable of being entirely alone, and yet – in spite of everything – succeeds in his life's goal of fitting the entire world into his ark.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Gen. 6:9.

2. Gen. 6:8.

3. 5:29.

4. Ezek. 33:24.

5. Gen. 14:13.

6. Genesis Rabba 42:8. The simple meaning of the epithet “HaIvri” is that Abraham came from the other side (ever) of the Euphrates; the Midrash adds another layer of meaning to this.

7. 14:14.

8. In the preface to Likkutei Moharan II.

9. Is. 50:6.

10. Ps. 106:3.

11. Ketubbot 50a.

12. Pesachim 68b.

13. Gen. 12:5.

14. Genesis Rabbah 39:14.

15. Ex. 32:32.

16. Gen. 1:31.

17. 6:6.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4942454/jewish/What-Was-Wrong-With-Noah.htm

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Noach: It’s Never too Late

Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

G-d said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh” (Genesis 6:13).

G-d did not bring on the Flood because He suddenly realized that He had made a mistake by creating the world. Rather, the pre-Flood and post-Flood realities were necessary stages in the world’s development, stages that are reflected in every individual’s life.

Before the Flood, reality was locked into the irresistible forces of cause and effect. Every good choice reinforced goodness permanently; every bad choice reinforced evil permanently.

The Flood softened reality by introducing the opportunity of repentance. Thus, when Noah emerged from the ark, what he beheld was not a ruined, post-apocalyptic devastation, but a new, fresh, world, full of promise and free from the shackles of the past.

In our own lives, too, we can mistakenly think that we are inescapably locked into a destiny dictated to us by our heredity, our upbringing, or our own prior errors. Because of the Flood, the exact opposite is true: it is never too late.

G-d is always waiting to welcome us back with open arms to begin anew.

Repentance, like the Flood, enables us to transform any challenging situation or turbulent phase of our lives into a means to cleanse us, refine us, and prepare us to carry on with greater faith and strength.

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Beyond Nature

Are we naturally good or naturally bad? On this, great minds have argued for a very long time indeed. Hobbes believed that we have naturally "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in Death." [1] We are bad, but governments and police can help limit the harm we do. Rousseau to the contrary believed that naturally we are good. It is society and its institutions that make us bad. [2]

The argument continues today among the neo-Darwinians. Some believe that natural selection and the struggle for survival make us, genetically, hawks rather than doves. As Michael T. Ghiselin puts it, "Scratch an 'altruist' and watch a 'hypocrite' bleed."[3] By contrast, naturalist Frans de Waal in a series of delightful books about primates, including his favourite, the bonobos, shows that they can be empathic, caring, even altruistic[4] and so, by nature, are we.

E. Hulme called this the fundamental divide between Romantics and Classicists throughout history. Romantics believed that "man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance."[5] Classicists believed the opposite, that "Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him."[6]

In Judaism, according to the Sages, this was the argument between the angels when God consulted them as to whether or not He should create humans. The angels were the "us" in "Let us make mankind." (Gen. 1:26) A Midrash tells us that the angels of chessed and tzedek said "Let him be created because humans do acts of kindness and righteousness." The angels of shalom and emet said, "Let him not be created because he tells lies and fights wars." What did God do? He created humans anyway and had faith that we would gradually become better and less destructive.[7] That, in secular terms, is what Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker argues too.[8] Taken as a whole and with obvious exceptions we have become less violent over time.

The Torah suggests we are both destructive and constructive, and evolutionary psychology tells us why. We are born to compete and co-operate. On the one hand, life is a competitive struggle for scarce resources – so we fight and kill. On the other hand, we survive only by forming groups. Without habits of co-operation, altruism and trust, we would have no groups and we would not survive. That is part of what the Torah means when it says, "It is not good for man to be alone." (Gen. 2:18) So we are both aggressive and altruistic: aggressive to strangers, altruistic toward members of our group.

But the Torah is far too profound to leave it at the level of the old joke of the Rabbi who, hearing both sides of a domestic argument, tells the husband, "You are right," and the wife "You are right," and when his disciple says, "They can't both be right," replies, "You are also right." The Torah states the problem, but it also supplies a non-obvious answer. This is the clue that helps us decode a very subtle argument running through last week's parsha and this one.

The basic structure of the story that begins with Creation and ends with Noah is this: First God created a universe of order. He then created human beings who created a universe of chaos: "the land was filled with violence." So God, as it were, deleted creation by bringing a Flood, returning the earth to as it was at the very beginning when "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the waters." (Gen. 1:2) He then began again with Noah and his family as the new Adam and Eve and their children.

Genesis 8-9 is thus a kind of second version of Genesis 1-3, with two significant distinctions. The first is that in both accounts a key word appears seven times, but it is a different word. In Genesis 1 the word is "good." In Genesis 9 it is "covenant." The second is that in both cases, reference is made to the fact that humans are in the image of God, but the two sentences have different implications. In Genesis 1 we are told that "God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27) In Genesis 9 we read, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made humanity" (Gen. 9:6).

The difference is striking. Genesis 1 tells me that "I" am in the image of God. Genesis 9 tells me that "You," my potential victim, are in the image of God. Genesis 1 tells us about human power. We are able, says the Torah, to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air." Genesis 9 tells us about the moral limits of power. We can kill but we may not. We have the power, but not the permission.

Reading the story closely, it seems that God created humans in the faith that they would naturally choose the right and the good. They would not need to eat the fruit of "the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," because instinct would lead them to behave as they should. Calculation, reflection, decision – all the things we associate with knowledge – would not be necessary. They would act as God wanted them to act, because they had been created in His image.

It did not turn out that way. Adam and Eve sinned, Cain committed murder, and within a few generations the world was reduced to chaos. That is when we read that "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart." (Gen. 6:6) Everything else in the universe was tov, "good." But humans are not naturally good. That is the problem. The answer, according to the Torah, is covenant.

Covenant introduces the idea of a moral law. A moral law is not the same as a scientific law. Scientific laws are observed regularities in nature: drop an object and it will fall. A moral law is a rule of conduct: do not rob or steal or deceive. Scientific laws describe, whereas moral laws prescribe.

When a natural event does not accord with the current state of science, when it "breaks" the law, that is a sign that there is something wrong with the law. That is why Newton's laws were replaced by those of Einstein. But when a human being breaks the law, when people rob or steal or deceive, the fault is not in the law but in the deed. So we must keep the law and condemn, and sometimes punish, the deed. Scientific laws allow us to predict. Moral laws help us to decide. Scientific laws apply to entities without freewill. Moral laws presuppose freewill. That is what makes humans qualitatively different from other forms of life.

So, according to the Torah, a new era began, centred not on the idea of natural goodness but on the concept of covenant, that is, moral law. Civilisation began in the move from what the Greeks called physis, nature, to nomos, law. That is what makes the concept of being "in the image of God" completely different in

Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. Genesis 1 is about nature and biology. We are in the image of God in the sense that we can think, speak, plan, choose and dominate. Genesis 9 is about law. Other people are also in God's image. Therefore we must respect them by banning murder and instituting justice. With this simple move, morality was born.

What is the Torah telling us about morality?

First, that it is universal. The Torah places God's covenant with Noah and through him all humanity prior to His particular covenant with Abraham, and His later covenant with Abraham's descendants at Mount Sinai. Our universal humanity precedes our religious differences. This is a truth we deeply need in the twenty-first century when so much violence has been given religious justification. Genesis tells us that our enemies are human too.

This may well be the single most important contribution of monotheism to civilisation. All societies, ancient and modern, have had some form of morality but usually they concern only relations within the group. Hostility to strangers is almost universal in both the animal and human kingdoms. Between strangers, power rules. As the Athenians said to the Melians, "The strong do what they want, while the weak do what they must."[9]

The idea that even the people not like us have rights, and that we should "love the stranger" (Deut. 10:19), would have been considered utterly strange by most people at most times. It took the recognition that there is one God sovereign over all humanity ("Do we not all have one father? Did not one God create us?"; Mal. 2:10) to create the momentous breakthrough to the idea that there are moral universals, among them the sanctity of life, the pursuit of justice, and the rule of law.

Second, God Himself recognises that we are not naturally good. After the Flood, He says: "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, even though the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on." (Gen. 8:21) The antidote to the yetzer, the inclination to evil, is covenant.

We now know the neuroscience behind this. Our brains contain a prefrontal cortex that evolved to allow humans to think and act reflectively, considering the consequences of their deeds. But this is slower and weaker than the amygdala (what Jewish mystics called the nefesh habehamit, the animal soul) which produces, even before we have had time to think, the fight-or-flight reactions without which humans before civilisation would simply not have survived.

The problem is that these rapid reactions can be deeply destructive. Often they lead to violence: not only the violence between species (predator and prey) that is part of nature, but also to the more gratuitous violence that is a feature of the life of most social animals. It is not that we only do evil. Empathy and compassion are as natural to us as are fear and aggression. The problem is that fear lies just beneath the surface of human interaction, and it can overwhelm all our other instincts.

Daniel Goleman calls this an amygdala hijack. "Emotions make us pay attention right now – this is urgent – and give us an immediate action plan without having to think twice. The emotional component evolved very early: Do I eat it, or does it eat me?"[10] Impulsive action is often destructive because it is undertaken without thought of consequences. That is why Maimonides argued that many of the laws of the Torah constitute a training in virtue by making us think before we act.[11]

So the Torah tells us that naturally we are neither good nor bad, but we have the capacity for both. We have a natural inclination to empathy and sympathy, but we have an even stronger instinct for fear which can lead to violence. That is why, in the move from Adam to Noah, the Torah shifts from nature to covenant, from tov to brit, from power to the moral limits of power. Genes are not enough. We also need the moral law.

[1] Hobbes, Leviathan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 48.
[2] See Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes), 1754.
[3] Ghiselin, The Economy of Nature and the Evolution of Sex (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 247.
[4] See Frans de Waal's discoveries in, for example, Good-Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals (Harvard University Press, 1996); Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved (Princeton University Press, 2006); Chimpanzee Politics (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society (Broadway Books, 2009); The Bonobo and the Atheist (W. W. Norton, 2013); Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are? (W. W. Norton, 2016).
[5] T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in T. E. Hulme: Selected Writings, ed. Patrick McGuiness (New York: Routledge, 2003), 69.
[6] Ibid., 70.
[7] See Bereishit Rabbah 8:5.
[8] Steven Pinker, The Better Angels of our Nature, New York:Viking, 2011.
[9] Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War 5.89.
[10] Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 13ff.
[11] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Temurah 4:13.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, so that they shall not understand one another's speech" (Gen. 11:7).

What is the connection between Adam's existential state of aloneness and the tragic social isolation which results from the Tower of Babel, when one universal language is replaced by seventy languages, leading to bedlam, confusion and dispersion?

To answer our question, let us begin by returning to the story of creation and God's declaration: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a help-opposite for him" (Gen.2:18). When Adam fails to find his 'help-opposite' among the animals, we are told: "The Lord God cast a deep sleep upon man and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place, and of the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21-22).

Why is the birth of Eve surrounded with this poetic quality? Why does her creation differ radically from all other creatures?

The answer is that had Eve been created from the earth like the rest of the animals, Adam would have related to her as a two-legged creature. Even if she walked and talked, she would end up as one of the animals to name and control. Her unique 'birth' marks her unique role.

In an earlier verse, we read that "God created the human being in His image; in the image of God He created him, male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27). "Male and female" suggests androgynous qualities, and on that verse, Rashi quotes a midrashic interpretation that God originally created the human with two "faces," Siamese twins as it were, so that when He put Adam into a deep sleep, it was not just to remove a rib but to separate the female side from the male side.

God divided the creature into two so that each half would seek completion in the other. Had Eve not emerged from Adam's own flesh to begin with, they could never have become one flesh again.

Awakening, Adam said of Eve, "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (2:23). His search was over, and what was true for Adam is true for humankind. In the next verse, God announced the second basic principle in life: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (2:24). "Leave" does not mean reject; but it does mean that one must be mature and independent in order to enter into a relationship of mutuality with one's mate. (How many divorces can be traced to crippling parent-child relationships!)

One of the goals of a human being is to become one flesh with another human being, and this, the truest of partnerships, can only be achieved with someone who is really part of yourself, only with someone to whom you cleave intellectually and emotionally. If a relationship suffers from a lack of concern and commitment, then sexuality suffers as well. The Torah wants us to know that for humans, sexual relations are not merely a function of

procreative needs, but rather an expression of mutuality on a profound level. Hence, in contrast to the animal kingdom, humans are not controlled by periods of heat; sexuality is ever-present. Thus, Nahmanides speaks of one flesh in allegoric terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one. Rashi interprets the verse, "You shall become one flesh" to mean that in the newborn child, mother and father literally become one flesh. In the child, part of us lives on even after we die.

The entire sequence ends with the startling statement, "And they were both naked, and they were not ashamed" (2:25). Given the Torah's strict standards of modesty, how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

I would suggest a more symbolic explanation: Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal their souls without external pretense. Frequently, we play games, pretending to be what we're not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word 'beged' (garment) comes from the same root as 'bagod' – to betray. With garments I can betray; wearing my role as I hide my true self. The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, so that they are free to express fears and frustrations, not afraid to cry and scream in each other's presence without feeling the "shame of nakedness." This is the ideal 'ezer kenegdo.'

The first global catastrophe, the flood, struck when the world rejected the ideal relationship between man and woman. Rape, pillage, and unbridled lust became the norm. Only one family on earth – Noah's – remained righteous. Now, with the Tower of Babel, whatever values Noah attempted to transmit to future generations were forgotten.

What exactly happened when one language became seventy is difficult to understand. Yet, metaphorically, one language means people understand each other. With their 'ezer-kenegdos,' existential and social loneliness is kept at bay as they become one in love and in progeny.

The Tower of Babel represents a new stage of depravity, not sexual, but social. People wanted to create a great name by building great towers, not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of materialism; the new god became splendid achievements with mortar and brick. As they reached greater physical heights, they forgot the human, inter-personal value of a friend, a wife, a life's partner. According to the Midrash, when a person fell off the Tower, work continued, but if a brick crashed to the ground, people mourned.

Thus the total breakdown of language fits the crime of people who may be physically alive, but whose tongues and hearts are locked – people who are no longer communicating with each other. It was no longer possible for two people to become one flesh and one bone, to stand naked without shame, to become 'ezer-kenegdos.' Existential loneliness engulfed the world and intercommunication was forgotten. The powerful idea of one language became a vague memory.

The Tower of Babel ended an era in the history of mankind, and the social destruction it left behind could only be fixed by Abraham. His message of a God of compassion who wishes to unite the world in love and morality is still waiting to be heard.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Survivors of Trauma

There are many words in the English language that originally had great power but have become watered down over the years to the point of meaninglessness. One such word is "survivor." Another is "trauma."

When I think back to my early adult life, I remember the word "survivor" being reserved for those who endured a severe crisis but, either because of their exceptional skills or good fortune, emerged from it with minimal physical harm. They resumed relatively normal lives but had to cope with a variety of practical and emotional challenges.

Nowadays, the word "survivor" is applied freely even to those who have experienced the normal and expected daily difficulties which all human beings face and who have simply gone on living. "Survivor" has thus become a term that easily fits all of us.

A similar observation could be made about the word "trauma." It was originally used to describe catastrophic conditions of great suffering, such as war, life-threatening illness, and natural disasters. Nowadays, the term is used freely to describe far lesser events. So much so that I recently overheard an ardent sports fans refer to her favorite team's loss of several consecutive ball games as a "recurring trauma."

Just last week, we began to reread the Pentateuch, the Chumash or "Five Books of Moses." This week, we read the second of a year-long series of weekly Torah portions, Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32). Throughout the coming year, we will search for the common themes of all of these readings.

There is one theme which, I suggest, pervades not only the Chumash, but the entire Jewish Bible. Indeed, it pervades all of Jewish history, down to this very day.

This theme is the story of the "survivor;" the person who lives through trauma and who copes, one way or another, with life as a survivor, with life after trauma.

One such person is the hero of this week's Torah portion, Noah. Noah survived the destruction of all of civilization. In the words of our Sages, he lived to see "a built-up world, a destroyed world, and a rebuilt world." Noah was a "survivor of trauma," no doubt about it.

There are many other candidates in the Bible who merit the term "survivor of trauma," Adam and Eve suffered trauma. They lived in paradise. But they lost it. That's trauma. They survived and went on to make lives for themselves. That's survival.

King David suffered trauma and was a survivor. So was Job, and so was Jeremiah. In a sense, so was Jonah.

Names of survivors in the long history of our people come readily to mind and include rabbinic sages such as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Maimonides suffered trauma and survived mightily, as did Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, who writes at length about the several traumas that he lived through and survived.

Finally, the horrific Holocaust, the ultimate trauma, left numerous survivors, some of whose memoirs are world famous, such as Victor Frankel, Primo Levy, and Eli Wiesel. I, for one, and many of the readers of this column, have known quite a few survivors.

In a sense, we are all survivors. Who can teach us the skills of survival?

Let us conceive of Noah as the archetypal survivor. What can we learn from this week's Torah reading about the way he coped with the challenges of survival in the wake of the world's nearly total destruction?

You know the story. Noah and the members of his immediate family find refuge in the Ark from the Great Flood. The flood ends, the waters recede, and finally the Almighty speaks to Noah and says, "Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives." They exit the ark. They survive the trauma.

But then, what does Noah do? What are his first actions as a survivor? He starts off on the proverbial right foot. "Noah built an altar to the Lord… He offered burnt offerings on the altar." Noah expresses his gratitude to the Almighty.

The Almighty responds in kind. He says, "Never again will I doom the earth because of man… Nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done."

The Almighty does not stop there. He goes on to bless Noah and his sons and He establishes an everlasting covenant with them.

So far, so good. But we abruptly learn of Noah's weakness. We read: "Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself within his tent. (Genesis 9:20-21)"

Noah resorts to drink to deal with the challenges that face every subsequent survivor of trauma. He was the first survivor to resort to intoxicating substances to cope with the aftereffects of trauma, but he most certainly was not the last.

Is intoxication the only coping method available to survivors? It is here that I'd like to bring an insight of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch into play.

He notes that the Hebrew word in our verse for "became drunk" is vayishkar. The root letters of this word are sh-kh-r. Rav Hirsch notes that there are several other words in Hebrew with similar root letters. Two of them are sh-y-r, song or poem, and sh-k-r, falsehood. He proceeds to explain that these three terms represent three different modes of relationship between truth and reality.

For Rav Hirsch, truth is not synonymous with reality. Reality is what is, whereas truth is what can be. The person who uses sh-y-r, the poetic imagination, knows that he can transform the truth which often lies hidden in the present into a new future reality. He need not live forever in a condition of post-traumatic stress. He can use the truth of his poetic imagination, of his hopes and dreams, to construct a new and better reality. This is the preferred mode for the survivor of trauma.

Noah, however, chose a different mode entirely. He chose sh-kh-r, drink. Faced with a traumatic reality, he creates for himself a fantasy reality, stimulated by intoxicating substances. He opts for a reality distorted by drink, an artificial reality, an illusion which fades rapidly with time. This is not a solution to the problem of post-traumatic survival.

Then there is a third mode, the mode of sh-k-r, of falsehood. This mode comes in many varieties. We now have a vocabulary for those varieties: denial, false ideologies, alternate facts, fictitious memories. These mechanisms will not dissipate the pernicious effects of traumatic experiences.

Clearly, Rav Hirsch recommends the method of sh-y-r, the cultivation of the positive processes which we all possess, but of which we are seldom aware: Creative imagination, enlisting the cooperation of others, courage, and above all hope.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is wont to explain, "Hope is not optimism and optimism is not hope. Optimism is the conviction that things will be better. Hope is the conviction that we can make things better."

The survivor who effectively deals with the traumas of his or her past strives to make things better, and in the process not only survives but thrives, transcends the painful memories of the past, and painstakingly constructs a better future.

Noah failed as a survivor. Perhaps that is perhaps the essential distinction between him and the hero of next week's Torah portion, Abraham. He too survived traumas, ten trials by the count of our rabbis, but he was able to employ the mode of sh-y-r, not sh-kh-r and not sh-k-r.

He utilized truth to create a new reality, the reality of monotheism and, eventually, the reality of the Jewish people.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Path to Decadence Begins Very Subtly

Parshas Noach describes in detail the decadence of the Generation of the Flood. They were corrupt and amoral, engaging in forbidden relationships, in theft, and in such degenerate practices that HaKadosh Baruch Hu eventually had to destroy the entire society with the exception of Noach and his family.

In light of this, it is difficult to understand the following Midrash Tanchuma. The Midrash writes: How far did the sin of the Dor HaMabul extend? Their problem was that they used to say "We don't want to know the opinion of the Torah (Da'as Torah ayn anu mevakshim)". At face value, this is a very difficult Midrash to understand. The pasuk states the extent of their decadence. So what does the Midrash mean that they were destroyed because "they did not seek out Da'as Torah"?

I saw in a sefer that the Midrash is not trying to understand "how bad it became." The Midrash is trying to understand "How did it all begin?" It did not start with extreme decadence. It started out far more subtly. Slowly but surely, things have a tendency to unravel. They throw this away, they throw that away, until they arrive at a terribly low spiritual level. But that is not where it all starts. So, when this Midrash asks about the nature of the corruption of the Dor HaMabul, the question is not about the end result. The Midrash inquires: How did it all begin? Where did they go wrong that an entire generation could sink so low?

On this the Midrash answers – because they were not interested in learning "the Torah's opinions about matters." This means that they did not try to understand what the Torah really asks of human beings. There is an expression, "There are the lines, and then there are the 'between the lines.'" The Dor HaMabul did not want to know what the 'between the lines' were. They asked "Does it say you cannot do this?" It was because that attitude was so pervasive that eventually they sank to the level spelled out in the Torah.

For instance, the Midrash says on the pasuk, "For the earth was filled with chamas (robbery) because of them." [Bereshis 6:13]: This is what the people of that generation often did: They would walk by a fellow who sold pickles (the Midrash actually gives the example of selling lupines, but since no one here has ever seen a lupine, we will speak about pickles). The seller had a barrel of pickles. Someone passes by and takes a pickle without paying for it. The seller yells "thief!" The customer argues "I am not a thief. The value of a single pickle is not even worth a perutah!" A second customer walks by, sees what the first customer got away with, and he also takes a pickle. "It's worth less than a shaveh perutah; this is not gezel; you cannot take me to court!" And so it went the entire day until by evening the seller had no pickles left and no income.

What was this attitude? How did they come to this state of corruption? It was because they felt "You cannot take me to court for less than a perutah value of merchandise!" That was their attitude.

Now, when the Torah says "Don't steal!" we understand that a person will not be brought to court for stealing less that a perutah in value, but what is "Da'ata shel Torah?" What is the Torah's intent when formulating this commandment? The Torah's intent is "You do not do that!!!" It is not right! Do not tell me "You can't sue me! You can't take me to court!" That may be the letter of the law, but that is not the spirit of the law.

When the Midrash Tanchuma places the expression "Da'ata shel Torah ayn anu mevakshim" (we do not seek the Torah's opinion on the matter) in the mouths of the pre-Mabul populace, they are expressing the sentiment of people who ignore the Torah's intent in formulating a legal system. The Torah's intent is that this pickle guy should not be left with no pickles and no income. This is not right! The Torah does not want that. This too is chamas (robbery).

Later on, when Sarah is angry with Avraham for not sticking up for her in her argument with Hagar, she uses the expression "Chamasi alecha" [Bereshis 16:5]. This is the same root as the word Chamas here by the Dor HaMabul. The Midrash there comments that the word Chamas in the expression Chamasi alecha means "failure to speak up." "I am your wife; she is your handmaiden. You see how she is talking to me and you did not say anything to object! You withheld your words!" The commentaries explain – Avraham withheld the words that he should have used to speak up in protest to Hagar. He withheld them, thereby "stealing them" from Sarah, so to speak.

This is a far finer spiritual shortcoming than the incident with the pickles, but it can sometimes be chamas not to say anything! The Gemara says [Brochos 6b] there is something called Gezel ha'Ani. Rashi explains that when a pauper says 'Good morning' to you and you do not respond, that is considered Gezel and Chamas! (You withhold an item from him – your 'Good morning' – that he rightfully has coming to him).

From where does this idea come? It is Da'ata shel Torah – it is the "spirit of the law." This is what is "between the lines" of the Torah's instruction to us.

The Ramban on Parshas V'Eschanan contains an idea which, in my humble opinion, is one of the most important teachings of the Ramban in his entire Chumash commentary. On the pasuk "You should do that which is right and good (yashar v'tov) in the Eyes of G-d…" [Devorim 6:18], the Ramban explains that this pasuk comes to include a command to also do that which is not spelled out in the Torah. Even if the Torah does not say it black on white, a person is nevertheless supposed to understand and try to define "What does Hashem want from me?"

The Torah cannot legislate every single thing that might happen in the world. How is a person supposed to know? The answer is the Torah tells us to "Do the right thing". Whatever is "yashar" (straight, with integrity) is the "opinion of Torah." The sin of the Dor HaMabul was that they refused to see the implications of the Torah, what the spirit of the law was, and what G-d wants from human beings. If that is a person's starting point, eventually he winds up at the level of "The land became corrupted before the L-rd and the land was filled with robbery." [Bereshis 6:11].

The Talmud [Bava Kamma 102a] states "All of Nezikin is a single tractate." The Ramban writes that this means that the tractates of Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia, and Bava Basra constitute a single Talmudic entity." What does this mean?

It means the following: Bava Kamma is about damaging one's neighbor. The Achronim say that Nezek (damage) is a form of Gezel (theft). Later chapters in Bava Kamma are all about theft – Merubeh, haGozel Eitzim. Nezek, Gezel, HaChovel – these are serious matters!

Bava Metzia is not about such blatant and overt things. Bava Metzia involves arguments between neighbors – I found this Talis first, no I found the Talis first; questions about how to pay workers and when to pay workers. In Bava Metzia we are not talking about crude theft and damages, we are speaking about refined monetary questions. Responsibilities regarding the returning of lost items – this is Bava Metzia.

What is Bava Basra? Bava Basra is about my own property I am not allowed to do things that may disturb my neighbor. The smell may bother him, the sight may bother him, he does not like that I can see into his window. That is Bava Basra. By strict Torah law, there are no such restrictions. If I want to have a pig farm that is piled high with manure in my back yard – where does the Torah specifically prohibit such practice? It does not! If the neighbor has a problem with the smell – let him move somewhere else! From the strict Torah law, this might be permitted, but that is not what the Torah is about.

All of Nezikin is one tractate – Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia, and Bava Basra. It starts out in Bava Kamma with crude theft and damage. It ends with Bava Basra which is "polite theft" (Eidele Gezeilah). It is not even about Gezeilah. It is about being a good neighbor. Where does it say in the Torah to be a good neighbor? That is, in fact, exactly what the Torah is all about. That is what the Dor HaMabul failed to see.

The Lesson of a Zeida's Influence and Imprint

Toward the end of the parsha, there is a list of generations following Noach, which include the following information: "And Cush gave birth to Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty man on earth. He was a mighty hunter before Hashem; therefore, it is said: 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Hashem.' The beginning of his kingdom was Bavel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From this land, Ashur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehovoth-ir, Clalah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city." [Bereshis 10:8-12].

What is the purpose of these pesukim? Who pays attention to this? Rashi explains what it means that Nimrod was "a mighty man." Rashi says the name Nimrod comes from the fact that this individual instigated a mered (rebellion), in which he aroused the entire world to rebel against the Almighty, in what became known as the Dor HaHaflaga (Generation of the Dispersion). Nimrod was the instigator of the project to build the Tower of Bavel, which was a symbol of mankind's rebellion against Heaven. Rashi interprets the words Gibor Tzayid (mighty hunter) to mean that he entrapped the people with the arguments of his mouth, convincing them to rebel against Hashem. He talked a sweet game and he used his powers of persuasion for distancing the population of the world from their Creator. Any person who has the audacity to be disrespectful of the Ribono shel Olam is called a "Nimrod" (rebel). He knows there is a G-d and he willingly chooses to rebel against Him.

Then the pasuk says "from this land Ashur went forth." Rashi comments: When Ashur saw his children becoming ensnared and entrapped in the persuasive powers of Nimrod leading them to rebel against G-d, and participate in the building of the Tower, he left them! Ashur said, "I have had it! I am leaving. I am not going to be part of this. My children are already ensnared by Nimrod, but I am out of here." What did he do? He built the great city – Nineveh.

Nineveh? Does that ring a bell? Of course it rings a bell! "…For Nineveh was a great city to the L-rd…" [Yonah 3:3] (I am told that the city of Mosul which is in Iraq is the ancient city of Nineveh.) Nineveh did Teshuvah. This is the story of Sefer Yonah. The whole city – all the Goyim – everybody did Teshuvah. Where did this come from? It came from the fact that Nineveh had a founder – a great-great-grandfather – Ashur, who proclaimed, "I am not going to be part of Nimrod!" He left. He built a city called Nineveh.

There is quite a bit of time between the times of Noach and the times of Yonah ben Amitai. This is a lesson to us of the imprint and influence a Zeida can have. Because he did not want to have any part of Nimrod's project and heresies – I am going to build my own city! – that city turned out to be "the shining city on the hill" called Nineveh. Such is the power of an ancestor.

Many times in life there are people who are Tzadikim, who are moser nefesh for Torah and mitzvos – and we look at their parents and we even look at their grandparents and we say: From where did they get this inspiration? The parents and grandparents are very simple individuals. We ask – what is the source of such spiritual greatness? The answer is that this person could have had a great-great-grandfather who is long gone and buried. The great-great-grandfather was a Yareh Shamayim, a Talmid Chochom, a holy Jew! Those seeds lie deep in the recesses of this person's DNA. This is the story of Ashur and Nineveh. Ashur walked away from Nimrod's rebellion and started a city of his own, which generations later became an Ir Gedolah L'Elokim.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the difference between a good builder and a poor builder? In this week's parsha of Noach, the Torah reveals to us details of a catastrophic building project. It was the attempt to construct Migdal Bavel - the Tower of Babel.

How couldthepeople living at that time get it so wrong? Why didn't they learnthelessonsofthe flood which had preceded them?I believe that the key to understanding this can be derived from a well known verse in this week's Haftarah. The prophet Isiah describes a time of great blessing for our peoplewhich includes:"V'chol banayich limudei Hashem v'rav shalom banayich,"- "And all your children shall be taught about Hashem and great shall be the peace of your

children.

”Chazal, our sages, famously say,“Al tikri banayich eileh bonayich.”“Don't read, “banayich” - “your children.” Instead read, “bonayich” - “your builders.”

Their message is clear. Our children are the builders of our future.In the construction industry it is well known how critically important the foundation of a building is. If one wishes to construct a strong and steady edifice it must be builtupon a solid foundation and that’s the message that we wish to impart to our children and grandchildren, the builders of our future: Please don’t just look upwards in terms of the height of the building that you want to construct. Also look downwards, dig deep into our past, appreciate your roots and guarantee that what you build for our future is constructed on the strongest possible foundations of trust and faith in God.

That was the mistake that the‘generation of the dispersion’made. They declared,“Hava nivne lanu ir umigdal v’rosho b’shamayim.”- “Come, let us build a city and a tower the top of which will be in the heavens.

”They only looked upwards. They didn’t look downwards.They declared, “V’naaseh lanu shem,” - “Let us make a name for ourselves.” They put trust in themselves. They put their faith in thatbuilding to protect them, instead of looking downwards to see the foundations of faith that the building should have been constructed upon. They didn’t remember the lessons from the flood.

Therefore the eternally true message emerging out of this epic passage for us is that as a people, the more we want to move forward,the more we need to look back. And the higher we wish to reach in terms of our attainment, the deeper we need to dig in order to discover our glorious heritage which provides the greatest possible foundations upon which we can build a great future.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Rabbi Shlomo Vilk - Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up

Time and time again, the Almighty God proves to us we must allow our weaknesses to show, that we must admit our sins, that there are no perfectly righteous people, and that there is no one opinion in the Torah. Anywhere anyone tries to voice one opinion, one view, or one truth, or espouse one tzaddik, or one party is immediately beset by the Jewish spirit, which spreads peace in the world in only one way – through disagreement.

In biblical stories about tzaddikim, righteous individuals, the protagonists constantly fail and falter, as in God’s act of creation. The wagon always breaks down, along with the family it was carrying. They always err, but Hashem chooses them nonetheless. They proceeded to become the forefathers of the Jewish people because they were role models, and they gave us hope because they showed us that we can both stay human and be chosen by God.

There was one fully righteous individual that was chosen by God to continue the human race. It was this same individual that lay naked in his tent after getting drunk and passing out, after which he cursed his son and grandson. We are his descendants. We descend from the one who survived the flood. Unlike Abraham, who, according to Israeli poet Yehuda Amihai, had passed on to us the “dagger in the heart”; the progenitor of mankind, which was restored, left us alcoholism as an heirloom.

These were the righteous of yesteryear… but we’ve improved in recent years. Tzaddikim are perfect. They don’t make mistakes. They fully espouse the views of the Torah, and the voice of God passes through their mouths with utter precision. They always know the truth, and they always do the right thing. If one of the servants exposes the truth about a Rebbe, or if some heretic publishes a more human biography about one of these tzaddikim, a tremendous outcry ensues to protest this terrible falsehood.

Today’s tzaddikim aren’t really human beings. They don’t have an evil inclination. In fact, they are greater than God Himself, who has occasionally admitted to making a bad judgment call. We’ve progressed, and today, being human is no longer acceptable, because that would mean that we are rather weak, and we may no longer let our weaknesses show.

The tzaddikim beseech the masses to make progress, but they bar the entranceway to the ark. Sinners may not enter, and only the faultless are allowed in. We should keep our distance from anything vaguely resembling a sin, or what we’d otherwise call real life. The church has already done so, many years ago. Several years later, Islam followed suit, and about two hundred years ago, it was the Jews’ turn to enter the age of perfection. There is no tzaddik in the land who will only do good, and not sin, so we will simply not live on this earth. We’ll live in heaven, instead.

Time and time again, Hashem proves to us that we must allow our weaknesses to show, that we must admit our sins, that there are no perfectly righteous people, and that there is no one opinion in the Torah. Anywhere anyone trying to voice one opinion, one view, or one truth, or espouse one tzaddik or one party is immediately beset by the Jewish spirit, which spreads peace in the world in only one way – through disagreement. We consistently reject attempts to “unite the clans” with a common tongue and common words. We tear down new towers of Babel erected by the right, or by the left, at yeshivot and at universities, before God scatters us throughout the world.

Truly, the biggest question concerns boundaries. When do we consider a dispute to be for the sake of heaven, and when does a dispute begin to resemble that of Korach and his congregation? Which opinions are legitimate, and which will not be allowed into our house of study? Who will we call the “worst” thing imaginable – a Reform Jew – after immediately sensing the clear and present danger, and whom can we come to love, at the end of the dispute, to the point that we’d be prepared to marry his daughter? When is a person like Shammai, and when is that person more like Elisha Ben Abuyah? Since the only one who can answer this question is the “minister of history”, we ought to tighten our control over the borders, and seal off our students’ ears, lest they learn to lie, causing us to incur the penalty of exile.

In such a case, we may even stop being afraid. After all, we have no way of sealing off our gates and our senses, and anything that passes through, inadvertently and stealthily, will end up as a sin, and cause us to go astray. We’ll learn that there are lights everywhere. We’ll peel off the outer layers and focus on the interior, and we’ll seek out a benevolent glance when we tread across a narrow and intimidating path. The sins of yesterday will be the answers of tomorrow, and things that needed to be kept concealed in the past will now become a way of life for us to follow.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Marcheshvan and Mi She'para

Last week we entered the month of Marcheshvan, and there is a widespread misconception that the official name of the month is Cheshvan and that the prefix "mar" - "bitter" is a colloquialism that indicates the bitterness of the month which is devoid of any holidays. This would be consistent with the informal practice of appending the prefix "menachem" - "consolation" to the month of Av, as an expression of solace and hopefulness that will mitigate all of the tragedies commemorated throughout the month of Av.

However, the Ramo (Even Ha'ezer 126:7) rules that the correct name of the month is in fact Marcheshvan and this is the name that should be used when dating documents such as a kesubah or a get. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 1:2) notes that the names of the Jewish months were adopted during the Babylonian exile, and therefore it is likely that the name Marcheshvan is the combination of two Babylonian words, "marach-shvan," corresponding to the Hebrew "yerech-shmini" - meaning "eighth month."[1]

Nonetheless, the Imrei Emes (Parshas Breishis) cites Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa who suggests that the name Marcheshvan is also connected to the Gemara in Megillah (27b), which states that it is prohibited to enter a bathroom directly upon completing the shemoneh esrei since "rechushei merachshen sefasei" - "his lips are still articulating his prayers." The name

Marcheshvan is related to the word "merachshen" - "articulating" because during the month of Marcheshvan our lips are still moving from the prayers of the yomim noraim and sukkos.

Indeed, during the month of Marcheshvan we read about three episodes of destruction, namely, the flood, the dispersion, and the city of Sodom. These are the same three incidents that are referenced in the curse levied against those who fail to fulfill their verbal commitments, known as a "mi she'para", which states (Bava Metzia 48a): "He who exacted payment from the people of the generation of the flood, and from the people of the generation of the dispersion, and from the inhabitants of Sodom … will exact payment from whoever does not stand by his word."

The Vilna Gaon (commentary to Yeshaya 4:6) observes that the generation of the flood was inundated with water - "mayim," the generation of the dispersion was scattered with wind - "ruach," and the city of Sodom was consumed by fire - "aish," which is similar to the creation of speech that generates a certain measure of heat (aish) and also involves saliva (mayim) and breadth (ruach). For this reason, the Hebrew word for "speech" is "amar," which is an acronym for a'ish, m'ayim, and r'uach, since all three of these forces are involved in facilitating proper speech.

The curse of a mi she'para evokes these three punishments, which correspond to the three elements of speech, in order to underscore the destructive nature of someone who corrupts their power of speech by reneging on their promises. Moreover, we read about these three events specifically during the month of Marcheshvan, as the commitments of the yomim noraim still linger on our lips and reverberate in our ears, to remind us that in order to avoid a mi she'para ourselves we must follow through on the verbal pledges that we made over the yomim noraim.

For this reason, we prepare for Rosh Hashanah by undoing our nedarim, and we do the same at the beginning of Yom Kippur with the recitation of Kol Nidrei, in order to stress the significance of any oral declarations that are uttered throughout the course of the day. However, the ease by which our vows are annulled also reminds us that talk is cheap, promises can be undone and pledges can be withdrawn, and therefore what Hashem truly desires is not merely words but tangible results and substantive change.

[1] See Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky, Tzarich Iyun: Mar Cheshvan, https://outorah.org/p/5691/

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Something's Lost in the Translation

Now the entire earth was of one language and uniform words. (Breishis 11:1) One language: Loshon HaKodesh. The Holy Tongue – Rashi

This is quite a remarkable record! At one time the entire world spoke one language and it was Hebrew, the Holy Tongue. For many reasons it makes a lot of sense. The major support for this premise is from our holy traditions but there is a definite logic to it as well.

Firstly our sages tell us that the world was created through the letters of the ALEPH BEIS. The Zohar says that HASHEM looked into the Torah and created the world. Adam the first man gave names to the creatures and the Torah tells us that those were the names. What does that mean? He gave each creature its essential name by identifying the letters with which it was created, which defines the optimal purpose for which it was created.

For example, a cow is a PARA – PEH REISH ALEPH! Why? What is the mission of a cow? Why is PARA an appropriate name? How are some other animals useful and not so useful? A goat gives milk and meat and skin but you can't ride a goat or use it to pull a plow or a wagon. A horse can pull a wagon and you can ride on it but it is not for milk or meat. A sheep gives wool and meat and milk but it serves no function for labor. Now a cow is good for all of these things. All PEH REISH words have to do with being fruitful and multiplying. (PERU) A PARA is the most PROductive creature because it is good for everything.

The Hebrew Language is different from all other languages. The Western Languages, like English are ideographic languages. "A" doesn't mean anything and "B" doesn't mean a thing. They represent sounds and when combined they produce words. When pronounced or read those words wake up pictures or the meanings implied by that combination of letters. CAT awakens a feline creature with whiskers that likes mice.

The written form of Eastern Languages is pictographic. The word for tree is an icon, a symbol, a picture of a tree. So it is with all other words. How to pronounce that word is a matter of memory based on a social agreement and a tradition about how it is spoken out loud.

These two language systems are a universe apart since the Tower of Babel was frustrated by G-d confounding their ability to communicate. It makes sense then that the original language Loshon HaKodesh, the Holy Tongue should have both ingredients of being sound oriented and picture based. The letter LAMED is not an arbitrary sound and the shape of the letter has a pictorial quality as well. The name of the letter LAMED means to learn. Observe the profile of someone who is sitting and learning. What do you see? Draw a line from the foot to the knee and then from the knee to the back and all the up the back to the head and you will have written the letter LAMED. LAMED as a prefix means, 'to" or "for", because when one learns, they gain both direction and purpose.

Loshon HaKodesh can be most closely compared to the language of chemistry. Water in Hebrew is MAYIM – MEM YUD MEM. Two MEM's and a YUD. In chemical language Water is H2O. Two Hydrogen atoms and an Oxygen – HOH. That's the true description of what's on the inside and what it is composed of. Now, Loshon HaKodesh also describes the purpose for which it is optimally made by the creator. A table is a SHULCHAN. SHJULCHAN does not mean a flat surface on which you serve food. The Hebrew source is the word SHALACH – send How so?

A SHULCHAN is a mailbox and a launching pad. It's an interface between heaven and earth. HASHEM sends us attractive and delicious foods in a physical format and through making blessings and singing to HASHEM and learning Torah we send back spiritual gifts. It's a huge understatement to say it but this all gives credence to the notion that "something's lost in the translation".

Weekly Parsha NOACH 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The ten generations described in the Torah, from Adam until Noach, produced only chaos and eventual destruction. There were a few individuals, such as Chanoch, who were moral and positive people. However, they had little, if any, influence on the general society in which they lived, and not even one person who would follow them and their moral behavior.

Our world, and all our societies are, to a great extent, copycat structures of those days. The general excuse for all immoral behavior from childhood is the expression "everyone is doing it". Somehow, this excuse, that everyone is doing it, removes responsibility from any individual who engages in any immoral activity. Thus, there develops a chain of almost never-ending failure, excuses, and willingness to accept bad behavior as a societal norm.

The ten generations that led up to the coming of the Great Flood sank into this morass of evil without realizing it. They were merely repeating the actions of the generations before them, and what they saw was everyone else behaving in a similar fashion. Evil and immoral behavior are very easily accepted in general and mass society. This notion explains Nazism in Germany and Stalinism in the Soviet Union. It also helps describe much of what is transpiring in Western society today.

The slow erosion of morality, good behavior and godly faith is a constant challenge to all societies, and if no one stands up against it, those societies are eventually doomed to their own self-destruction.

In the eyes of Jewish scholarship and tradition, Noach is found wanting, not so much for his own personal failings after the Flood, but, rather, for his inability to stand against the evil in his society. He builds an ark and warns against the impending disaster that is about to befall the human race. However, he is unable to identify evil for what it is, and to declare a viable alternative for human beings to adopt and follow. There is a feeling of hopelessness that seems to envelop him and his actions, and he fails in building a new world because of the belief that "everyone does it" is a sufficient excuse for bad behavior and human immorality.

It is because of this that Midrash and Jewish tradition generally view Noach and his righteousness with a fair degree of skepticism. His planting of the vineyard as his first project after emerging from the ark is an example of the acceptance of the idea that if everyone does it, then, somehow, it can be justified and even lauded. It is almost painful to read in the Torah how Noach fails to remake the world after the Flood in a better image and a more positive vein.

The Torah illustrates for us that great people can have great failings, and that lost opportunities will always come back to haunt us and frustrate human progress. We are all the descendants of Noach, and his character traits exist within our personal DNA even millennia later. We will have to wait for the arrival of Abraham and Sarah to put us on a better and more upward trajectory of belief and behavior.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Beyond Nature (Noach)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Are we naturally good or naturally bad? On this, great minds have argued for a very long time indeed. Hobbes believed that we have naturally "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in Death."[1] We are bad, but governments and police can help limit the harm we do. Rousseau to the contrary believed that naturally we are good. It is society and its institutions that make us bad.[2]

The argument continues today among the neo-Darwinians. Some believe that natural selection and the struggle for survival make us, genetically, hawks rather than doves. As Michael T. Ghiselin puts it, "Scratch an 'altruist' and watch a 'hypocrite' bleed."[3] By contrast, naturalist Frans de Waal in a series of delightful books about primates, including his favourite, the bonobos, shows that they can be empathic, caring, even altruistic[4] and so, by nature, are we.

E. Hulme called this the fundamental divide between Romantics and Classicists throughout history. Romantics believed that "man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance."[5] Classicists believed the opposite, that "Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature

is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him."[6]

In Judaism, according to the Sages, this was the argument between the angels when God consulted them as to whether or not He should create humans. The angels were the "us" in "Let us make mankind." (Gen. 1:26) A Midrash tells us that the angels of chessed and tzedek said "Let him be created because humans do acts of kindness and righteousness." The angels of shalom and emet said, "Let him not be created because he tells lies and fights wars." What did God do? He created humans anyway and had faith that we would gradually become better and less destructive.[7] That, in secular terms, is what Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker argues too.[8] Taken as a whole and with obvious exceptions we have become less violent over time.

The Torah suggests we are both destructive and constructive, and evolutionary psychology tells us why. We are born to compete and co-operate. On the one hand, life is a competitive struggle for scarce resources – so we fight and kill. On the other hand, we survive only by forming groups. Without habits of co-operation, altruism and trust, we would have no groups and we would not survive. That is part of what the Torah means when it says, "It is not good for man to be alone." (Gen. 2:18) So we are both aggressive and altruistic: aggressive to strangers, altruistic toward members of our group.

But the Torah is far too profound to leave it at the level of the old joke of the Rabbi who, hearing both sides of a domestic argument, tells the husband, "You are right," and the wife "You are right," and when his disciple says, "They can't both be right," replies, "You are also right." The Torah states the problem, but it also supplies a non-obvious answer. This is the clue that helps us decode a very subtle argument running through last week's parsha and this one.

The basic structure of the story that begins with Creation and ends with Noah is this: First God created a universe of order. He then created human beings who created a universe of chaos: "the land was filled with violence." So God, as it were, deleted creation by bringing a Flood, returning the earth to as it was at the very beginning when "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the waters." (Gen. 1:2) He then began again with Noah and his family as the new Adam and Eve and their children.

Genesis 8-9 is thus a kind of second version of Genesis 1-3, with two significant distinctions. The first is that in both accounts a key word appears seven times, but it is a different word. In Genesis 1 the word is "good." In Genesis 9 it is "covenant." The second is that in both cases, reference is made to the fact that humans are in the image of God, but the two sentences have different implications. In Genesis 1 we are told that "God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27) In Genesis 9 we read, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made humanity" (Gen. 9:6).

The difference is striking. Genesis 1 tells me that "I" am in the image of God. Genesis 9 tells me that "You," my potential victim, are in the image of God. Genesis 1 tells us about human power. We are able, says the Torah, to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air." Genesis 9 tells us about the moral limits of power. We can kill but we may not. We have the power, but not the permission.

Reading the story closely, it seems that God created humans in the faith that they would naturally choose the right and the good. They would not need to eat the fruit of "the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," because instinct would lead them to behave as they should. Calculation, reflection, decision – all the things we associate with knowledge – would not be necessary. They would act as God wanted them to act, because they had been created in His image.

It did not turn out that way. Adam and Eve sinned, Cain committed murder, and within a few generations the world was reduced to chaos. That is when we read that "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart." (Gen. 6:6) Everything else in the universe was tov, "good." But humans are not naturally good. That is the problem. The answer, according to the Torah, is covenant.

Covenant introduces the idea of a moral law. A moral law is not the same as a scientific law. Scientific laws are observed regularities in nature: drop an object and it will fall. A moral law is a rule of conduct: do not rob or steal or deceive. Scientific laws describe, whereas moral laws prescribe.

When a natural event does not accord with the current state of science, when it "breaks" the law, that is a sign that there is something wrong with the law. That is why Newton's laws were replaced by those of Einstein. But when a human being breaks the law, when people rob or steal or deceive, the fault is not in the law but in the deed. So we must keep the law and condemn, and sometimes punish, the deed. Scientific laws allow us to predict. Moral laws help us to decide. Scientific laws apply to entities without freewill. Moral laws presuppose freewill. That is what makes humans qualitatively different from other forms of life.

So, according to the Torah, a new era began, centred not on the idea of natural goodness but on the concept of covenant, that is, moral law. Civilisation began in the move from what the Greeks called physis, nature, to nomos, law. That is what makes the concept of being "in the image of God" completely different in Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. Genesis 1 is about nature and biology. We are in the image of God in the sense that we can think, speak, plan, choose and dominate. Genesis 9 is about law. Other people are also in God's image. Therefore we must respect them by banning murder and instituting justice. With this simple move, morality was born.

What is the Torah telling us about morality?

First, that it is universal. The Torah places God's covenant with Noah and through him all humanity prior to His particular covenant with Abraham, and His later covenant with Abraham's descendants at Mount Sinai. Our universal humanity precedes our religious differences. This is a truth we deeply need in the twenty-first century when so much violence has been given religious justification. Genesis tells us that our enemies are human too.

This may well be the single most important contribution of monotheism to civilisation. All societies, ancient and modern, have had some form of morality but usually they concern only relations within the group. Hostility to strangers is almost universal in both the animal and human kingdoms. Between strangers, power rules. As the Athenians said to the Melians, "The strong do what they want, while the weak do what they must."[9]

The idea that even the people not like us have rights, and that we should "love the stranger" (Deut. 10:19), would have been considered utterly strange by most people at most times. It took the recognition that there is one God sovereign over all humanity ("Do we not all have one father? Did not one God create us?"; Mal. 2:10) to create the momentous breakthrough to the idea that there are moral universals, among them the sanctity of life, the pursuit of justice, and the rule of law.

Second, God Himself recognises that we are not naturally good. After the Flood, He says: "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, even though the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on." (Gen. 8:21) The antidote to the yetzer, the inclination to evil, is covenant.

We now know the neuroscience behind this. Our brains contain a prefrontal cortex that evolved to allow humans to think and act reflectively, considering the consequences of their deeds. But this is slower and weaker than the amygdala (what Jewish mystics called the nefesh habehamit, the animal soul) which produces, even before we have had time to think, the fight-or-flight reactions without which humans before civilisation would simply not have survived.

The problem is that these rapid reactions can be deeply destructive. Often they lead to violence: not only the violence between species (predator and prey) that is part of nature, but also to the more gratuitous violence that is a feature of the life of most social animals. It is not that we only do evil. Empathy and compassion are as natural to us as are fear and aggression. The problem is that fear lies just beneath the surface of human interaction, and it can overwhelm all our other instincts.

Daniel Goleman calls this an amygdala hijack. "Emotions make us pay attention right now – this is urgent – and give us an immediate action plan without having to think twice. The emotional component evolved very early: Do I eat it, or does it eat me?"[10] Impulsive action is often destructive because it is undertaken without thought of consequences. That is why Maimonides argued that many of the laws of the Torah constitute a training in virtue by making us think before we act.[11]

So the Torah tells us that naturally we are neither good nor bad, but we have the capacity for both. We have a natural inclination to empathy and sympathy, but we have an even stronger instinct for fear which can lead to violence. That is why, in the move from Adam to Noah, the Torah shifts from nature to covenant, from tov to brit, from power to the moral limits of power. Genes are not enough. We also need the moral law.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, so that they shall not understand one another's speech" (Gen. 11:7).

What is the connection between Adam's existential state of aloneness and the tragic social isolation which results from the Tower of Babel, when one universal language is replaced by seventy languages, leading to bedlam, confusion and dispersion?

To answer our question, let us begin by returning to the story of creation and God's declaration: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a help-opposite for him" (Gen.2:18). When Adam fails to find his 'help-opposite' among the animals, we are told: "The Lord God cast a deep sleep upon man and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place, and of the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21-22).

Why is the birth of Eve surrounded with this poetic quality? Why does her creation differ radically from all other creatures?

The answer is that had Eve been created from the earth like the rest of the animals, Adam would have related to her as a two-legged creature. Even if she walked and talked, she would end up as one of the animals to name and control. Her unique 'birth' marks her unique role.

In an earlier verse, we read that "God created the human being in His image; in the image of God He created him, male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27). "Male and female" suggests androgynous qualities, and on that verse, Rashi quotes a midrashic interpretation that God originally created the human with two "faces," Siamese twins as it were, so that when He put Adam into a deep sleep, it was not just to remove a rib but to separate the female side from the male side.

God divided the creature into two so that each half would seek completion in the other. Had Eve not emerged from Adam's own flesh to begin with, they could never have become one flesh again.

Awakening, Adam said of Eve, "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (2:23). His search was over, and what was true for Adam is true for humankind. In the next verse, God announced the second basic principle in life: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (2:24). "Leave" does not mean reject; but it does mean that one must be mature and independent in order to enter into a relationship of mutuality with one's mate. (How many divorces can be traced to crippling parent-child relationships!)

One of the goals of a human being is to become one flesh with another human being, and this, the truest of partnerships, can only be achieved with someone who is really part of yourself, only with someone to whom you cleave intellectually and emotionally. If a relationship suffers from a lack of concern and commitment, then sexuality suffers as well. The Torah wants us to know that for humans, sexual relations are not merely a function of procreative needs, but rather an expression of mutuality on a profound level. Hence, in contrast to the animal kingdom, humans are not controlled by periods of heat; sexuality is ever-present. Thus, Nahmanides speaks of one flesh in allegoric terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one. Rashi interprets the verse, "You shall become one flesh" to mean that in the newborn child, mother and father literally become one flesh. In the child, part of us lives on even after we die.

The entire sequence ends with the startling statement, "And they were both naked, and they were not ashamed" (2:25). Given the Torah's strict standards of modesty, how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

I would suggest a more symbolic explanation: Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal their souls without external pretense. Frequently, we play games, pretending to be what we're not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word 'beged' (garment) comes from the same root as 'bagod' – to betray. With garments I can betray; wearing my role as I hide my true self. The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, so that they are free to express fears and frustrations, not afraid to cry and scream in each other's presence without feeling the "shame of nakedness." This is the ideal 'ezer kenegdo.'

The first global catastrophe, the flood, struck when the world rejected the ideal relationship between man and woman. Rape, pillage, and unbridled lust became the norm. Only one family on earth – Noah's – remained righteous. Now, with the Tower of Babel, whatever

values Noah attempted to transmit to future generations were forgotten.

What exactly happened when one language became seventy is difficult to understand. Yet, metaphorically, one language means people understand each other. With their 'ezer-kenegdos,' existential and social loneliness is kept at bay as they become one in love and in progeny.

The Tower of Babel represents a new stage of depravity, not sexual, but social. People wanted to create a great name by building great towers, not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of materialism; the new god became splendid achievements with mortar and brick. As they reached greater physical heights, they forgot the human, inter-personal value of a friend, a wife, a life's partner. According to the Midrash, when a person fell off the Tower, work continued, but if a brick crashed to the ground, people mourned.

Thus the total breakdown of language fits the crime of people who may be physically alive, but whose tongues and hearts are locked – people who are no longer communicating with each other. It was no longer possible for two people to become one flesh and one bone, to stand naked without shame, to become 'ezer-kenegdos.' Existential loneliness engulfed the world and intercommunication was forgotten. The powerful idea of one language became a vague memory.

The Tower of Babel ended an era in the history of mankind, and the social destruction it left behind could only be fixed by Abraham. His message of a God of compassion who wishes to unite the world in love and morality is still waiting to be heard.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parshas Noach

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Moshe ben Bentzion,

Throwing a Brick

Each man said to his friend, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them in the fire." And the brick served for them as stone and the asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens…" (11:3-4).

At the end of this week's parsha we find the well-known story of the Tower of Bavel, which took place at a time when many of the descendants of Noach migrated to a specific area so that they could all dwell together. They were united with a single language and a single purpose: To build a tower and commence an attack on Hashem.

Yet the Torah's description of the events is atypical. First, the Torah goes out of its way to relate the discussion of the construction process ("let us make bricks and burn them in the fire") and seems to needlessly elaborate on why they needed bricks in the first place (to serve in place of stone). The Torah relating these seemingly unimportant details is very curious.

Second, and even stranger, the discussion on the purpose of these bricks follows the description of making the bricks. Meaning, it is only after they start making bricks that they resolve to build a city and a tower to reach the heavens. Ordinarily, a story would begin with what is trying to be accomplished and then the process as to how the plan is implemented. However, here it seems that they only conceived of building a city and a tower after creating the construction process.

Lastly, the tower of Bavel is quite well known, but one generally doesn't hear much regarding the city of Bavel, which seems to be an integral part of the story. In fact, when Hashem descends, as it were, to see what's going on the Torah says that "Hashem descended to see the city and the tower." What is this emphasis on the city?

This story, which occurred over 3,500 years ago, holds a remarkable lesson that is incredibly relevant to our times. This is the story of the onset of technology. Prior to this, man used to quarry stone or use wood to construct his home. This meant there was a constant reminder that we are living in a natural world with a Creator. The concept of being able to manufacture your own materials to construct a huge city and an accompanying tower meant that mankind had now seized power over his environment. It was this technological advance that spurred the rebellion against God. Not much has changed.

In the last hundred years, the world has seen significant advancements in almost every field of study and this has led to unprecedented technological innovations. From air travel to atomic bombs to vastly extending the human life expectancy, the world bears little resemblance to the thousands of years of history that were mostly technologically stagnant. Even the technological advances of the past two decades are

beyond what anyone living in the mid-20th century could have ever imagined.

Yet, as we as a society continue to advance technologically, there seems to be a parallel decline and deterioration in moral values and overall "life satisfaction." What was once considered murder is now readily acceptable behavior and what was considered perverse is now deemed a life style choice. There is an ever growing population of individuals who turn to medicine, illegal drugs, or alcohol to make their lives more bearable. Even the outwardly "most successful" individuals are often in therapy for a variety of issues. Why would the greatest advances in life lead to a less fulfilling one?

The answer is that the world has become a monument to mankind. Society has gone from being theocentric to self-centered. Technology has given mankind a "God complex" making us believe that we are in control of our destiny and we are the very focus of our existence. We have decided that the sole purpose of the world is to serve us and give us pleasure; no wonder mankind's wanton behavior has taken a terrible toll and the impact may lead to catastrophic consequences for our world.

Living in a theocentric world, a man has purpose and responsibilities outside of himself. Naturally, he will care about his family, his society, and the world at large. On the other hand, being focused on one's own pleasures naturally leads to unhappiness.

The physical world is obviously limited; likewise there is a limit to the pleasure one can achieve. The ever growing drive to derive more pleasure can be all consuming and trying to fill limitless desires with physically limited options leads inexorably to frustration. Additionally, the natural outgrowth of being primarily focused on one's own desires is that it will clash with the needs and desires of others in one's life (family, co-workers, friends, etc.).

The industrial revolution, which led to the creation of megacities that changed society from rural living to city living, directly contributed to this moral decline and self-centered attitude. Even today, middle America (which is still rural) has mostly remained religious and retained a moral compass. The coastal regions, where most of the largest US cities are located, have become much less so.

Living in a world driven by mankind's technology, we must find a way to understand and internalize that technology is only a tool to do more for our purpose in the world; to create an awareness and a palpable experience of living in a theocentric world.

Did You Know...

Some interesting facts (from Midrash Rabbah 31:10-32:11):

1. There's a dispute regarding what light source was in the teivah. One opinion says that Noach made a window, while others say that there was a pearl that gave off light. According to the opinion that it was a pearl, they say that the sun and the moon's light did not reach the Earth during the flood due to clouds (others say that they didn't function at all). Interestingly, the pearl let them know when it was night and day by giving less light during the day.
2. According to one opinion the teivah had 900 rooms, each 12 by 12 feet (about the typical size of a room on a modern cruise ship).
3. According to Rashi, the bottom floor was for waste, the second floor had the animals, and Noach and his family were on the top floor. Some opinions in the Midrash switch the bottom and top floors, which must have involved a complicated waste disposal system.
4. Noach even took demons on to the teivah to save them.
5. The fish didn't die because they never sinned and in the deep ocean they were safe.

This week's parsha is about Hashem's decree to flood the Earth, and what happened in the aftermath of this epic flood. Hashem commands Noach to build the teivah (ark) and fill it with his family and all the animals in order to save them from the flood. We thought it might interesting to contrast the teivah with one of the most famous ships in modern history: the RMS Titanic.

Specs	***Teivah***	**Titanic**
Time to Build	120 Years	3 Years
Construction	4	15,000
Crew	600 Feet	882 Feet
Length	100 Feet	92 Feet
Width	60 Feet	104 Feet
Height	22 Feet	34 Feet
Draught	3	9
Decks	35,741 Tons	46,328 Tons
Weight	378 Days	5 Days
Length of Service		

chiefrabbi.org
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Noach: How responsible was Noah for the flood?

Is it possible that Noah bore some responsibility for the flood?

Such a seemingly preposterous suggestion arises out of the haftarah for Parshat Noach, Isaiah 54. There is a direct link between verse 9 of the haftarah and the parsha.

There, the prophet refers to the flood and reassuringly tells us that in the same way as Hashem has kept His word never again to destroy life on earth, so too He will keep His word not to be angry with us nor to rebuke us.

Now, both Abarbanel and Radak point out that this verse can be read in two different ways. In both ways there's a reference to the flood, but there's one significant difference between the two. The prophet says, "Ki mei noach, zot li."

If you read 'ki mei' as one word, it's "kiymei Noach," – "Like in the days of Noah." This is a reference to a particular period in time. Hashem is saying, "As for Me, this is like in the days of Noah."

Alternatively 'ki mei' can be two different words. "Ki mei Noach," – "Like the waters of Noah." Hashem is saying, "As for me, this is like the waters of Noah," as if to suggest that we can call the flood Noah's flood.

This possibility is preferred by us around the shabbat table, when in 'Yonah Matza' (one of the zemirot sung on Shabbat) we sing, "ka'asher nishba al mei Noach," – "Just as Hashem swore to us concerning the waters of Noah."

Referring to the flood in this way is an indication that Noah did bear some element of responsibility. And the reason is clear: he was charged by Hashem to build an ark over a long period of 120 years. What Hashem had in mind was the possibility that Noah would reshape the minds and the hearts of people, that he would influence and inspire them to turn in teshuva, but he failed to do this with even a single person.

As a result, he did bear some element of responsibility for what ensued.

Let us therefore learn not to be like Noah in this respect. In the event that we are aware of a situation which is wrong and we are in a position to influence and to inspire others to change direction, let us never fail in our responsibility to change things for the better.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha Parshas Noach - Window to the World

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

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

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

Noach is told to build a window. It seems practical enough; after all sitting for an entire year can get awfully stuffy. So Noach is commanded to build a window for breathing room. It is a little troubling. Does Noach need a command to add something so simple as a window? Does it make a difference

whether or not he had a window? Did that command have to be incorporated into the heavenly plans for an ark that would endure the ravaging flood?

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

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

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

Dedicated by Marty & Reva Oliner in memory of Reb Shimon Sumner of blessed memory.

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Noach: Letters of Protection

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Action, looks, words, steps, form the alphabet by which you may spell character. - Johann Kaspar Lavater

God is enraged with humanity. They prove to not only be corrupt but they also corrupt their environment. Their evil and vileness scream to the heavens and God answers with a deluge to wipe out all of humanity, with the aim to start anew with Noah and his family.

God instructs Noah to build an ark, where his family and representatives from the animal kingdom will be spared to repopulate Earth. Noah dutifully builds the Ark. The animals arrive two-by-two, leaving a planet about to be destroyed, to then sail upon its destruction, and almost a year later land on a world wiped clean of any other living beings.

The Ark was their transport and protection for the duration of the Flood. The word "Ark" in Hebrew is "Tevah" which is also the same word in Hebrew for "letter". The Chidushei HaRim explains that these homonyms, these words with the same spelling and the same pronunciation, but different meanings, are not coincidental.

There is a deep, divine and powerful attribute to each of the Hebrew letters, specifically the Hebrew letters of the Torah and of prayer. Just as Noah's Ark can be a vessel of protection, somehow, each of us can escape a deluge of troubles by seeking refuge within the Hebrew "Tevah", the Hebrew letters that we learn and recite. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in some mystical way, and most powerfully, the letters of the Torah and of prayer, can provide a certain measure of protection from the elements of the world that seek to drown us.

When trouble comes our way, as it inevitably does, we don't need to spend years building an ark, we don't need to gather supplies to survive Armageddon, we can open the Torah, open a Siddur (the Prayer book) and read.

May we find shelter and sanctuary in something as simple as holy letters and words.

Dedication - To the post-holiday season.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rav Kook Torah

The Sabbath Influence

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

It took an old man running with myrtle twigs to stop Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai from destroying the world.

The Talmud in Shabbat 33b relates how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son secreted themselves in

a cave, hiding from the Romans. They spent twelve years secluded in Torah study and prayer, living off the fruit of a carob tree and fresh water from a spring.

When at last they heard that the Roman decree had been rescinded, Rabbi Shimon and his son left the cave. But years of seclusion had transformed the two scholars. When they saw people everywhere occupied with mundane activities, plowing fields and sowing grains, they were filled with outrage. "They forsake eternal life and engage in temporal life!"

In their zeal, wherever they looked was immediately consumed by fire. Rabbi Shimon and his son were unable to reconcile themselves to the realities of everyday life, and a heavenly voice commanded them to return to their cave for an additional twelve months.

When they left the cave the second time, they came across an old man holding two twigs of myrtle branches. It was twilight, moments before the approach of the Sabbath, and the old man was running.

"What are the myrtle twigs for?" inquired Rabbi Shimon.

"They are in honor of the Sabbath," the old man replied.

"But why two twigs?"

"One is for Zachor ['Remember the Sabbath'] and the other is for Shamor ['Keep the Sabbath holy']."

Rabbi Shimon turned to his son, "See how precious the mitzvot are to the people of Israel!" And their minds were put to ease.

What was it about the old man and his myrtle twigs that reconciled Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son to the world and its mundane activities?

Shamor and Zachor

There are a number of differences in the text of the Ten Commandments as it appears in Exodus (in the reading of Yitro) and in Deuteronomy (in Va'etchanan). One difference is in the fourth command, the mitzvah of the Sabbath. In Yitro it reads Zachor — 'Remember the Sabbath day' (Ex. 20:8) — while in Va'etchanan it reads Shamor — 'Keep the Sabbath day holy' (Deut. 5:12).

According to the Sages, these two versions are two sides of the same coin. Both Shamor and Zachor were communicated in a single Divine utterance. "God spoke once, but I heard twice" (Psalms 62:12).

Shamor and Zachor correspond to two basic aspects of the Sabbath. Shamor, keeping the Sabbath holy, refers to the quality of the Sabbath itself as a time of holiness. It corresponds to the intrinsic sanctity of the day, transcending all mundane activities, elevating us to a higher realm of holiness.

Zachor, to remember the Sabbath, on the other hand, refers to the Sabbath's influence on the other days of the week. While we fulfill the mitzvah of Shamor by abstaining from all forms of Halachically defined work on the Sabbath, the mitzvah of Zachor is performed during the week. As the Sages explained in Mechilta Yitro, if one comes across an especially choice portion of food, one should "Remember the Sabbath" and set it aside to be enjoyed on Shabbat.

Zachor thus represents the power of the Sabbath to draw forth the energy of the days of worldly activity and elevate them with its special holiness. True, this is just a reminder of the Sabbath, and during the week we are primarily occupied with mundane pursuits. Yet the soul is naturally drawn to holiness, and the quest for a higher purpose in life is ingrained deep within us.

It was precisely this quality of Zachor that enabled Rabbi Shimon and his son to look upon everyday life in a positive light. The very fact that the Sabbath is able to influence the days of work reveals the soul's innate closeness to God.

Honoring the Sabbath

Now many of the details in the story may be understood. Why the emphasis on the twilight hour? Why was the old man running? What is the significance of the myrtle twigs?

Twilight (בין השמשות) is a bridge between one day and the next. Twilight between Friday and the Sabbath is the hour that connects the secular week with the holiness of Shabbat. The old man was running to honor the Sabbath at twilight on Friday eve; his action reflected the influence of the Sabbath on the rest of the week by way of its connection to Shabbat.

Why did the old man honor the Sabbath with fragrant myrtle twigs?

Superficially, the weekdays appear mundane and lowly. In truth, they contain an inner reserve of holiness, but this inner holiness can only be perceived with an acute spiritual sensitivity. The myrtle twigs reflect this heightened sensitivity, since we appreciate their fragrance through our sense of smell. The Sages wrote that of the five senses, the sense of smell is the most refined, giving pleasure to the soul (Berachot 43b).

The two twigs correspond to the two aspects of the Sabbath, one for Zachor, connecting the Sabbath with

the rest of the week, and one for Shamor, guarding the Sabbath's inherent sanctity.

And what is the significance of the old man running? The elderly do not usually run. What gave him this youthful energy and vitality? As the old man held the fragrant myrtle twigs in his hands, he felt the holy influence of the Sabbath on the other days of the week. This unusual combination of an old man running is a metaphor for the synthesis of the Sabbath, with its innate holiness and wisdom, and the weekdays, with their energy and productivity.

Combining Temporal with Eternal

We must still clarify: how did this sight enable Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son to accept the mundane activities of everyday life?

The key lies in Rabbi Shimon's statement, after witnessing how the old man honored the Sabbath: "See how precious the mitzvot are to the people of Israel!"

Rabbi Shimon was no longer troubled by the neglect of eternal values due to preoccupation with day-to-day activities. The striking image of an old man running to honor the Sabbath brought home the realization that the mitzvot are truly the inner life-force of our lives. The scholar saw that even in their everyday life, the Jewish people are tightly bound to eternal values. These binds give strength to the weak and weary, so that even the elderly are able to serve God with exuberance and vitality.

His profound disappointment with society was eased when he realized that the transformation of old age to youthful vitality is only possible when worldly activity transcends its ordinary boundaries and enters the realm of holiness. Not only was Rabbi Shimon able to accept the people's occupation with mundane pursuits, he now recognized the added value to be gained precisely through this wonderful combination of the temporal and the eternal.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 37-40. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III on Shabbat 33b (2:278).)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah – Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parashas Noach
פרשת נח תשפ"ב

צא מן התיבה אתה ואשתך

Go forth from the Ark, you and your wife. (8:16)

Chazal teach that when Noach emerged from the Ark to find a world destroyed, he complained to Hashem: "You should have shown mercy on Your children." Hashem replied, "Foolish shepherd, you should have spoken up before I destroyed the world." Clearly, *Chazal's* words are laden with profound wisdom and numerous lessons. One message that Hashem's words immediately impart addresses the need to care for others. Noach knew that a flood would occur. He seemed to be concerned for himself and his family. At the end of his journey, when he perceived the scope of the devastation, it hit home that the flood might have been averted. He immediately blamed Hashem, which is standard fare for anyone who refuses to accept any responsibility. Hashem rebutted that Noach woke up too late. He should have defended his generation before the fact. Now it was too late. Hashem implied that Noach's sole concern was for himself and his family. He neglected to express his distress concerning the rest of his generation.

We all have a moral obligation to care for others. *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*; "Love your fellow as (you love) yourself" is the rule of life by which we should all live. If something is not right with my fellow, then, by extension, something is not right with me. My life may not/cannot go on with business as usual if my fellow is undergoing an experience which is taking its toll on him. We are all one collective being. We must feel the pain of others and act upon it, because their pain is our pain.

In a lecture to a large group of post-seminary students who had already entered into the matrimonial chapter of life, *Rav* Nochum Diamont posed the following question: "When you meet a prospective young man, what is the question that is uppermost in your mind?" They all answered, "Is he *matiim*, suitable, for me?" He continued, "Clearly, all of you are concerned primarily for yourselves, since no one replied, 'Am I suitable for him?'" Having said this, he continued with the following hypothetical situation: "You marry, and shortly thereafter you discover that your husband has a condition that does not allow him to tolerate air conditioning. You, on the other hand, cannot breathe in a stuffy room. Now what?" The girls presented various responses: "He should sleep with a blanket over his head, so that he will not feel the draft." This selfish reply was followed by many others – all of which indicated that these young women were clueless concerning the harmony and caring for one

another that must permeate a marriage. Each was more focused on herself than her spouse. This, explained the *Rav*, was a recipe for disaster.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 20) teach that in the generation of Rabbi Yehudah bar Elai, the poverty among the students was so great that six students shared one *tallis*/blanket covering. *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, explains how six could possibly be covered by one blanket. Each one cared for his fellow; thus, he pushed the blanket toward the other student. Since each one of the six was pushing away from himself, his friend was covered. Had it been the other way around, with each one pulling toward himself, the blanket would have quickly been torn to shreds.

ויצא נח

So Noach went forth. (8:18)

The flood waters receded, and Hashem instructed Noach to leave the Ark. *Chazal* (*Zohar* 1:256) teach that when Noach exited the *Teivah*, Ark, and beheld the devastating destruction of humanity, he began to weep uncontrollably. He said to Hashem: "*Ribono Shel Olam*, You are called *Rachum*, Merciful; thus, You should have been merciful on Your creations." Hashem replied, "Now you come with complaints. Why did you not issue your defense for humanity when I told you My plans to send a flood that would destroy the world? You made an Ark to save yourself and your family. Why did it not enter your mind (then) to appeal on their behalf? Now, when the world was destroyed (and you were spared), you offer your protest."

Chacham einov b'rosho, "A wise man – his eyes are in his head." This means he thinks when he sees. His cognitive insight penetrates through whatever ambiguities might lie before him and guides him concerning the proper course of action. *Horav Dov Schwartzman, zl,* observes that one often sees his sin, but fails to consider the collateral damage that results from his indiscretion. Hashem intimated to Noach: "I informed you of My impending punishment. A world that has no moral compass cannot continue to exist. You accepted the decree and sought refuge for yourself. You should have prayed on their behalf. You did not. That is cruel!"

Veritably, we cry after the tragedy has occurred. Why do we wait until it is a *fait accompli* and the devastation has taken place – before we grieve and pray? We should pray when there is still opportunity to prevent the decree from achieving fruition – when our prayer can, and will, make a difference.

In his commentary to the *parshah* (9:20), *Sforno* explains the error in Noach's actions post-Flood. *Vayachel Noach ish ha'adamah*, "And Noach, the man of the earth, began." He writes: Noach began with an unsuitable project: the planting of a vineyard, which resulted in his drinking of the wine, which under normal circumstances would appear innocuous; yet, a small fault at the beginning led to far more serious consequences. A similar occurrence took place in Shittim, where the people acted immorally with the Midyanite women. This led to full scale idolatry.

Sforno offers a similar approach toward understanding the words, *Vayeired Hashem liros*, "And Hashem came down to see" (11:5). He explains that the idiom, "descending to see," is employed with regard to Hashem when the action of the sinner does not in and of itself merit punishment, but will inevitably lead to more serious deterioration, similar to the actions of the *ben sorer u'moreh*, wayward and rebellious son. Hashem sees the ultimate consequences of a present act or condition. In the case of the Tower of Bavel, He examined the act and determined the outcome. As a result of this Heavenly insight, Hashem dispersed the people, thereby preventing a greater sin from occurring.

Viewing a situation cognitively is imperative – both from its possible negative consequence and also from a positive perspective, which can be encouraging and motivate one to strive higher and work harder for a favorable outcome. First and foremost, however, one must know/realize that whatever success or failure he has is predicated on an objective self-view of his strengths and weaknesses. *Rav* Schwartzman interprets the opening words of our *parshah*: *Eileh toldos Noach – Noach* (*ish tzaddik*). These are the offspring of Noach – Noach. Every person should be acutely aware that the first fruits of his endeavor is himself. The first creation, offspring, product of Noach, is Noach. Our goal is to create ourselves in such a manner that we act *b'tzalmo*, in His image, *kidmuso*, in His likeness. A visionary is one who visualizes a completed product when all he has before him is the rough materials. Prior to presenting a vision of the future, one must first perfect the present: himself. One can hardly plan for tomorrow if his "today" hangs in the balance.

ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס

Now the earth had become corrupt before G-d; and the earth became filled with robbery. (6:11)

ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים

The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose. (11:1)

Parashas Noach presents two cultures, both evil: one was destroyed; and the other was dispersed – but allowed to live. The generation of the Flood was destroyed. Although the people's sin was not so much directed Heavenward, their base immorality, lack of ethical character, and their licentious behavior earned them such ignominious repute that they had to be destroyed.

The generation of the Dispersal, however, worked together to build a world community, sow the seeds of a single culture with themselves in the leadership role. They had no room for G-d in their lives. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 109a) distinguish between the *dor ha'Mabul* and the *dor Haflagah*. *Eilu lo pashtu yad b'ikar, v'eilu pashtu yad b'ikar*, "The former did not plan a rebellion against Hashem, the latter did." One may think that the sin which produced the *Migdal Bavel*, Tower of Bavel, was more egregious than the moral turpitude that prevailed during the generation of the Flood. Immorality trumps idol worship?

Chazal allude to this question and proclaim, *limdah*, this teaches, *she'sanui ha'machlokes v'gadol ha'shalom*. "How despicable is strife/controversy and how great is peace." The generation of the Flood consisted of quarrelers who constantly contended with one another. They had no respect for one another. The *dor Haflagah* were unified – perhaps in the wrong thing and for the wrong purpose, but, at the very least, unity reigned among them. *Gadol ha'shalom*, if people can get along, then Hashem allows them to live. When their peaceful endeavors "infringe" upon Heaven; when their unity produces a tower upon which they hope to ascend to spar with G-d – they are dispersed, not destroyed. *Machlokes*, divisiveness, controversy, is anathema even if it does not reach the Heavens.

Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl (quoted by *Horav* Yissachar Frand), asks how we can posit that love and harmony reigned during the generation of the dispersal, when *Chazal* relate that the builders were so obsessed with their tower that it took center stage in all their endeavors. To them, the loss of a brick was of greater concern than the loss of a human being. One who was carrying a brick up the tower slipped and fell, losing life and brick. The builders mourned the loss of the brick – not the life. If this is what peace is all about – keep it! Where is the abiding love and friendship that supposedly reigned in that society? Their *shalom* was at best superficial and based on ulterior motives. Is this form of *shalom* worthy of protecting these idol worshippers? Apparently yes – but why?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that even if people have their "differences," they do not see "eye-to-eye," or worse, their relationship has completely soured to the point that there exists a deep-rooted animus between them, the mere fact that they can work together to achieve a common goal is meritorious and considered *shalom*. It may be two-dimensional and shallow, but, for all intents and purposes, if they can maintain a semblance of unity in working together, it is *shalom*. In other words, if the *shalom* is only surface-deep and temporary, but, for the present, people are talking and working together, it is still *shalom*.

If I may add, this is by no means the ideal concept of peace. *Shalom* is derived from *shaleim*, perfect, whole. Something that is superficially whole, but internally broken, is incomplete. *Shaleim* denotes total harmony, maintaining a complete accord between the external and inner aspects of things. All perfection is the realization of this idea. True peace is not fashioned only in an exterior mold. It must emanate from within, in harmonious accord with what is presented externally. Thus, one who claims to be at peace with others – but within himself he is beset with internal strife, ambiguity, self-doubt and depression – has not achieved peace.

At times, it is necessary to "disturb the peace" in order to achieve true inner peace. Pinchas did that when he demonstrated passivity in the face of a *chillul Hashem*, profanation of Hashem's Name. This act represented the antithesis of peace. One must sacrifice everything for peace – even peace itself. One may never sacrifice the rights of others, nor may he sacrifice that which Hashem has declared to be good and true, for the sake of peace. To paraphrase *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, "There can be true peace among men only if they are all at peace with G-d." Last, he who wishes to restore the peace which has been broken (through the seditious activities of those who live counter to G-d's commandments) must himself be *shaleim*, whole, perfect, at peace with himself and with others.

The *kanai*, zealot, who disturbed the peace in order to create peace, the one whom Hashem attests was the paragon of peace, was Pinchas. As a result of his zealotry, he was blessed with *Brisi Shalom*, the Covenant of Peace.

In recent times (last century), *kanaus* of all forms has emerged as the mainstay and excuse for protesting the secular incursions that have undermined the sanctity of the soul of our Holy Land. This is not the forum for taking a position pro or con, but rather to characterize one of the premier *kannaim*, a holy man whose devotion to *Klal Yisrael*, Torah and *mitzvos* was unequivocal and without peer, *Horav Amram Blau, zl.* When *Rav* Amram saw *chillul Shabbos*, desecration of the holy *Shabbos*, he was in physical pain. He viewed this as a knife in the heart and soul of the Jewish People. Sadly, the secularists who offensively and publicly profaned *Shabbos* did not look at it this way. Having been, for the most part, raised on a diet of anti-Orthodox diatribe, they could not fathom how one of their own could be so connected to an ideal and culture; thus, as far as they were concerned, Orthodoxy was archaic at best, and extinct at worst.

Their attitude did not deter *Rav* Amram from standing on Kikar HaShabbos at the entrance to Meah She'arim and screaming, "*Shabbos! Shabbos*!" to protest the driver who was driving through this Orthodox enclave in open defiance of Torah law and in obvious disrespect of its inhabitants. This was not a new confrontation, and, every *Shabbos*, the protestors were violently beaten by the police, who would push and beat without mercy, making one wonder how brother could strike brother with such vicious animus. This went on week after week to the incredulous reaction of the *chareidim*, Orthodox Jews, who wondered why and what was gained by the constant provocation. The *chillul Shabbos* continued unabated; the protestors were beaten with impunity and without remorse. Was it really worth it?

The simple answer would be: "When it hurts – one cries out" and *chillul Shabbos* hurts! *Rav* Amram, when asked this question by a distinguished Orthodox journalist and personality, replied with a powerful insight (one which we should all consider in our daily endeavor), "Tomorrow, the reporters are going to write that Amram Blau screamed, *Shabbos* and the police beat him in response. This report will be read by Jews all over the Holy Land. They will look at the pictures of *chareidim* lying on the ground, mercilessly being beaten by police – for what? For caring about *Shabbos*! Eventually, these pictures and reports will circulate to the news agencies and, ultimately, around the world. People will ask – what does this old man want? What is *Shabbos*? Why does it mean so much to them? Eventually (even) one Jew might decide to delve into *Shabbos*, its significance to the Jewish People, its sanctity and elevating effect on the entire Jewish mindset and psyche. Who knows – he might, as a result, become observant! This makes it all worth it."

We now have an idea of how true *kanaus* leads to *shalom*.

וימת הרן על פני תרח אביו... באור כשדים

Haran died in the lifetime of his father… in Uhr Kasdim. (11:28)

Rashi quotes the *Midrash* that interprets the word *al pnei* as *mipnei* to mean "because of" Terach. Terach produced idols. His son, Avraham, saw the folly of idol worship and decided to do something about it. So, he smashed Terach's wares. Fatherly love was trumped by both economics and fidelity to the evil king Nimrod. Terach felt that his son needed to be taught a lesson. Nimrod was only too happy to comply. Avraham *Avinu* was sentenced to be burned to death in the fiery caldron. Haran, Avraham's brother, was challenged to choose between Avraham and Nimrod. Not being a man who took chances, he hedged his response, thinking to himself, "If Avraham emerges unscathed, then I, too, will enter the flames. If, however, Avraham dies, there is no reason that both of us should die. I will capitulate to Nimrod. Avraham was sincere in his commitment and conviction; thus, he was spared. Haran's commitment was contingent on his safe passage through the flames, which was insufficient reason for being spared. While Haran's self-sacrifice was far from perfect, he did ultimately perish sanctifying Hashem's Name. We have a rule that Hashem never shortchanges a person's reward (*Bava Kamma* 38b). Anyone who expends effort to serve Hashem in any way will receive his due reward. How was Haran rewarded for his less-than-perfect act of self-sacrifice?

The *Rama m'Panu, zl* (*Gilgulei Neshamos*), writes that the *neshamah*, soul, of Haran was *nisgalgeil*, transmigrated, to the body of Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol*, who is referred to as *ud mutzal mei'eish*, "firebrand saved from the fire." Yehoshua survived *galus Bavel*, the Babylonian exile, to return to Yerushalayim. He was a holy man, which is

attested to by his survival and return to the Holy City. He, together with Zerubavel ben She'altiel, a group of *Neviim* in which Zecharyah *HaNavi* was included, proceeded to rebuild the *Bais Hamikdash*. Rebuilding the Temple does not ensure that the people living in the country are spiritually committed to its spiritual demands, its altered culture and the way of life it would promote. Assimilation had begun to make its way among the people, with a number of prominent Jews descending into the abyss of intermarriage with their non-Jewish neighbors. Even some of Yehoshua's sons were guilty of this calamitous infraction. This presents the backdrop for the confrontation between *Satan* and Yehoshua which is described in Zecharyah's prophecy.

The *Navi* describes Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol* standing before the Angel of Hashem, with *Satan* standing on his right to accuse him. The Angel of Hashem denounces the *Satan*, claiming that Yehoshua is a firebrand saved from a fire. Nonetheless, a "stain" on Yehoshua's family was evidenced by the *Navi's* reference to Yehoshua's "filthy" garments. This was an implication concerning Yehoshua's lack of excoriating his sons for their iniquitous marriages. The Angel commanded that Yehoshua's sons leave their forbidden wives in order to expunge the stain on Yehoshua's garments.

The term *ud mutzal mei'eish* requires explanation. On the surface, it refers to Yeshoshua's being flung into a fiery furnace by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Bavel. Apparently, two false prophets, Achav ben Kulyah and Tzidkiyahu ben Maasyah, prophesied to the king that they had been dispatched by Hashem. The king decided to test the veracity of their statements by throwing them into the same fiery furnace from which Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah emerged unscathed. If they were truly prophets, they, too, would enjoy being spared. The two false prophets countered that they were only two, while their predecessors in the fire were three. Nevuchadnezar instructed them to select a third person to join them. They selected Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol* with the hope that, in his merit, they would be spared. Yehoshua survived; thus the appellation: a firebrand saved from the fire; they did not. An inspiring story, but why should Yehoshua be absolved for not criticizing his sons? Being a survivor does not mitigate his refusal to censor his sons. [Veritably, when Yehoshua was flung into the furnace, he emerged, but his clothes were burnt. This could have been considered a sufficient message to him.]

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, cites the *Rama mi'Panu* to explain Yehoshua's unique nomenclature: *ud mutzal mei'eish*. Being that Yehoshua was the *gilgul* of Haran, he had already been burned in his previous life. Therefore, Hashem spared him from Nevuchadnetzar's nefarious decree. At the end of the day, Haran acted appropriately by sacrificing his life for Hashem. His failing was that his intentions were faulty and not *lishmah*, purely for the sake of Heaven. Haran lacked pure thought, which was later repaired by Yehoshua who went into the flames with full conviction and complete commitment to Hashem. An *ud mutzal mei'eish* is a charred remnant of Haran! The Angel of Hashem confronted *Satan* with this message: Yehoshua is special, having already once been through the flames. True, he might require a reprimand for not castigating his sons, but he twice sustained the fires, which absolves him from any iniquity. As Haran's *gilgul*, Yehoshua repaired Haran's less-than-perfect act of self-sacrifice. We now know the "other side of the story."

Va'ani Tefillah

ולמקללי נפשי תדום ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה – *V'limkallelai nafshi Sidom, vnafshi k'afar la'kol tiheyeh*.

To those who curse me, let my soul be silent and let my soul be like dust to everyone.

It would have been sufficient to just say – *edom* – to those who curse me I shall be silent. Why does the *nefesh*, soul, have to be included in the petition? Likewise, why not simply request that one be humble? Why is it necessary that his soul be like dust? The *Reishis Chochmah* (*Shaar Anavah* 3) explains that it may occur that one outwardly remains mute when he is cursed; or he acts in a manner which presents him as humble. For all intents and purposes, the person is self-efficacious – does not respond to curses and remains outwardly humble under all circumstances. What about his inner soul, his psyche, his essence? Does he really tolerate, ignore, forgive the curse? Is he truly humble, or does he sense within himself a feeling of arrogance, which allows him to think that he is better than others? Thus, the prayer petitions that the muteness which he presents be real, a reflection of his inner essence, and that his humility not be superficial, but emanating from his core self, his *nefesh*.

Horav Shlomo Alkabetz, zl, explains the metaphor of *afar*, dust, as representing something

which is stepped on – but does not react. Likewise, one's humility should tolerate the abuse and arrogance of others, but does not elicit a reaction from him. *Ohr HaYashar* explains the comparison to dirt/dust, which is indestructible. Likewise, we pray that our legacy continue forever.

In loving memory of our dear Abba and Zeidy, on his yahrzeit

Mr. Zev Aryeh Solomon ר' זאב ארי' ב"ר יעקב שמואל ז"ל .

נפטר ח' חשון תשע"ד ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

It's Not Good for a Couple to Agree (Always)
The Majesty of Debate
Rabbi YY Jacobson

"How is married life?" David asks his old buddy Abe.

"It's quite simple," Abe responds. "When we got engaged, I did most of the talking and she did most of the listening. Later, when we married, she began doing all of the talking and I began doing all of the listening. Now, ten years later, we both do all of the talking and the neighbors do all of the listening."

The Woman's Role

This week we begin the Torah afresh. The opening portion of the Torah, Bereishis, captures the first 1,600 years of human history. It is filled with enrapturing tales that encapsulate the most profound mysteries and challenges of the human condition, including gender relationships.

It all begins with one verse, describing the purpose of marriage. "And G-d said, 'It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper against him (1).'"

(Until this point, Adam and Eve were fused into one body. Here they were divided into two distinct creatures, each one possessing his or her unique structure and personality (2)).

The choice of words the Torah employs to describe the role of the feminine spouse — "a helper against him" — seems contradictory. If a wife is supposed to serve as a helper to her husband, she is obviously not "against him?"

Much has been written to explain the meaning of this verse (3). Two of the commentators, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv (4), interpret the sentence exactly the way it sounds (5): The woman becomes a "helper" for her husband by sometimes being against him. For a husband to become the maximum he can be, he must profess the courage to welcome the ideas and feelings of his spouse which may be "against" his own.

The Hollering Spouse

Some men cannot tolerate their wives disagreeing with them, and conversely, some women cannot handle another opinion. They grow angry and frustrated, exploding or imploding. What often transpires, as a result, is that the woman, or the man, in order to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the home, remain silent. Or, to avoid confrontation, they just drift away from each other emotionally. Or the arguments never cease.

The Torah is teaching us a different option. Each of us needs to be saved from our egos, insecurities, blind spots, and wounds. When a man and woman learn to genuinely embrace the otherness of his/her spouse, they can develop a true bond and reach their own core.

This does not mean, of course, that it is a biblical injunction upon every woman to disagree with her husband 100 percent of the time. (A man once asked me: If he stated an opinion alone in a forest away from his wife, would he still be wrong? I told him: Your mistake is that you think you need to state your opinion for her to know what you think.) For a relationship to work, spouses must learn the art of compromise. She must learn to see things from his perspective, and conversely; and they must both be flexible, kind, and reasonable.

What it does mean, though, is that we must learn to understand and respect the distinctive personality, primal desires, and needs of our second half.

Looking Out the Other Window

Irving David Yalom is a 90-year-old Jewish American existential psychiatrist who is emeritus professor of psychiatry at Stanford University, and author of many books on psychology, including When Nietzsche Wept. In his book The Gift of Therapy (chapter 6) he shares this story: (5*)

Decades ago I saw a patient with breast cancer, who had, throughout adolescence, been locked in a long, bitter struggle with her naysaying father. Yearning for some form of reconciliation, for a new, fresh beginning to their relationship, she looked forward to her father's driving her to college—a time when she would be alone with him for several hours. But the long-anticipated trip proved a disaster: her father behaved true to form by grousing at length about the ugly, garbage-littered creek by the side of the road.

She, on the other hand, saw no litter whatsoever in the beautiful, rustic, unspoiled stream. She could find no way to respond and eventually, lapsing into silence, they spent the remainder of the trip looking away from each other.

Many years later, she made the same trip alone and was astounded to note that there were two streams—one on each side of the road. “This time I was the driver,” she said sadly, “and the stream I saw through my window on the driver’s side was just as ugly and polluted as my father had described it.” But by the time she had learned to look out her father’s window, it was too late—her father was dead.

“Look out the other’s window. Try to see the world as your patient sees it,” Yalom says. "The woman who told me this story died a short time later of breast cancer, and I regret that I cannot tell her how useful her story has been over the years, to me, my students, and many patients."

A happy life is one in which I can accept that I and my spouse look at the world from two distinct windows, and see two different things. I cannot hope or expect that my spouse will start seeing the world through my window. What we must strive for is to respect the fact that other people see the world through other windows, and try to listen, appreciate, and empathize with what they are seeing and experiencing, even if it is not what I am seeing and experiencing.

The blessings and depth of a relationship can only emerge when each side learns how to truly listen to and respect the point of view of the other. I may not see things the way you do, but I must be able to honor your truth. Marriages—and so many other close relationships—fall apart when one party feels he or she professes the exclusive “objective truth.” Truth in marriage is usually subjective.

Maintaining the Balance

But how do couples guarantee that the proper proportions are preserved? How do we ensure that the "against him" component of a spouse does not overwhelm and subdue the "helper" dimension of a spouse?

The Talmud (6) states that in the beginning, G-d planned to create man and woman as two distinct people. In the end, however, He created them as one (only afterward did He proceed to divide them into two, as stated above). Why did G-d "change His mind," so to speak?

Perhaps He wished to teach us how a married couple ought to relate to one another. In marital relations, there ought to be both an "in the beginning" and an "in the end." In the beginning, husband and wife ought to be two; each party should express his or her opinion freely and uninhibitedly. Then, in the end, they ought to find a way to reconcile the different views into one unified pattern of behavior, making out of many—one, E Pluribus Unum.

This may be one of the symbols behind an interesting distinction between the tefillin (phylacteries) that Jewish men wrap on their heads vs. the tefillin wrapped on their arms. The tefillin we place upon our head is conspicuously divided into four sections, each chamber contains another fragment of parchment inscribed with one portion of the Torah. The tefillin we place on our arm, however, is conspicuously made of one chamber and all of the four portions are inscribed on a single piece of parchment placed in one container. Why?

On the "head" level — the analytical level — diversity between couples is desirable. Let each party argue his or her point. Let each one listen to another point of view; let every husband and wife learn what the world looks like through the other’s “window.” However, on the "arm" level — the level of implementation and action — there must be one path, one verdict, one pattern of behavior. If not, chaos might reign and the home and family will suffer (7).

G-d's Yearning Not to be Alone

G-d and His people are often compared in the Tanach to a husband and wife (8). Thus, this verse — "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper against him" — may also be understood symbolically as a statement concerning the relationship between G-d and humanity.

Prior to the creation of the world, G-d, the ultimate "Man" was "alone." Even after creating the world, G-d could have revealed His presence in our lives so that we would still experience cosmic oneness; we would perceive the universe as an extension of His infinite light and energy.

Yet G-d chose otherwise. He chose to create a world that would eclipse His reality. G-d chose to create a human being with the ability to deny Him, to ignore Him, to expel Him from his or her life. Why would G-d arrange such a situation?

The answer is, because "It is not good for Man to be alone; I will make Him a helper against Him." What this represents symbolically is that G-d's profound pleasure and help stems precisely from this opposition to Him. When a human being, who intuitively feels

himself detached from G-d, cracks the shell of his or her external layers, to discover the light of G-d within; when a person challenges the coarseness of his nature to find the tiny flame of idealism etched in the recesses of his heart — this allows for the blessing of a real relationship. This "grants" G-d the joy of engaging in a genuine relationship with the human person (10). We become co-partners in the work of repairing and healing the world.

So the next time your wife disagrees with you, or the next time you "disagree" with G-d, emotionally or psychologically — don't get frustrated. On the contrary, this is an opportunity for you to experience the ultimate raison d'etre of your marriage (11).

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1) Genesis 2:18.

2) This is clear from the biblical narrative. Cf. Talmud Berschos 61a; Eiruvin 18a; Midrash Rabah Bereishis 8:1; quoted in Rashi Genesis 1:27.

3) See Talmud Yevamos 63a; quoted in Rashi to this verse.

4) 1745-1812. Rabbi Schnuer Zalman, the author of the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch HaRav, was the founder of the Chabad school of Chassidism. A similar interpretation can be found in the commentary Haamek Davar and Harchev Davar by the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816-1893. He was the dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva and one of the great rabbis of his day.)

5) Torah Or Bereshis pp. 4-5.

5*) My thanks to Mr. Moshe Zeev Lamm. LCSW (Monsey, NY), for sharing this with me.

6) Talmud Berachos and Eiruvun ibid.

7) This idea was suggested by Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel (1883-1946), a rabbi in Lithuania, then in Antwerp, and finally, from 1937 until his death, chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, in his work Hegyonos El Ami, on Bereishis. (An English translation, entitled Jews, Judaism & Genesis was published in Jerusalem in the year 2000 by the Rabbi Amiel Library, under the auspices of the American Mizrachi movement).

8) The entire book of Song of Songs is based on this analogy. Cf. Rambam Laws of Teshuvah ch. 10

9) See Ezekiel 1:26; Torah Or ibid. p. 5a.

10) See Tanya chapter 26.

11) This essay is based on a discourse by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (Torah Or referenced in footnote #5), and on the commentary of Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin) on this verse in Genesis, see Haamak Davar and Harchav Davar.

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha
For the week ending 5 November 2011 / 7 Heshvan 5772

Fish with Legs?!

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

In Parshas Noach we read about how Hashem brought the Mabul (Great Flood / Deluge) and destroyed all living creatures, save for those inside Teivas Noach (Noach's Ark).[1] Additionally, we find that the fish in the oceans were spared as well.[2] It would be fascinating to find out on which side of the Ark a "fish with legs" would have been. Would it have been considered a fish, and therefore spared, or an animal and two might have been sheltered inside while the rest of the species were wiped out?

A Fishy Tale?

Far from being a theoretical question, this issue was actually brought up almost 400 years ago, when a certain Rabbi Aharon Rofei (perhaps Rabbi Dr.?)[3] placed such a fish, known as a Stincus Marinus in front of the then Av Beis Din of Vienna, the famed Rabbi Gershon Shaul Yom Tov Lipman Heller, author of such essential works as the Tosafos Yom Tov, Toras HaAsham and Maadanei Yom Tov, and asked for his opinion as to the kashrus status of such a "fish", unknowingly sparking a halachic controversy.

What is a (Kosher) Fish?

This was no simple sheilah. It is well known that a kosher fish must have both fins and scales.[4] This so-called "fish" presented actually had scales, but legs instead of fins. Yet, technically speaking would that astonishing characteristic alone prove it as non-kosher?

Chazal set down a general rule that "Whatever has scales has fins as well",[5] and should still be presumably kosher. This means that if one would find a piece of fish that has scales noticeably present, one may assume that since it has scales, it must therefore have fins as well, and is consequently considered kosher. This ruling is codified as halacha by the Rambam, as well as the Tur and Shulchan Aruch.[6]

As for our Stincus Marinus, which had scales but legs instead of fins, the Tosafos Yom Tov[7] averred that this "fish" cannot be considered kosher, as the above mentioned ruling was referring exclusively to actual fish and not sea creatures. Since the Stincus Marinus

has legs instead of fins, it could not be considered a true fish, and must therefore not be kosher.

Many authorities, including the Mahar"i Chagiz, the Knesses HaGedolah, Rav Yaakov Emden, the Malbim, and the Aruch Hashulchan, agreed to this ruling and considered the Stincus Marinus an aquatic creature and not a true fish and thus decidedly non-kosher.[8] This is similar to the words of the Rambam,[9] that "anything that doesn't look like a fish, such as the sea lion, the dolphin, the frog, and such - is not a fish, kosher or otherwise."

However, the Pri Chodosh[10] rejected the opinion of the Tosafos Yom Tov, maintaining that Chazal's rule that "whatever has scales also has fins, and is presumed kosher", equally applies to all sea creatures, not just fish, and actually ruled that the Stincus Marinus is indeed kosher, irregardless of whether or not it is considered a true fish.

The Bechor Shor[11]wrote that in his assessment, this whole disagreement was seemingly borne of a colossal misunderstanding, and all opinions would agree to an alternate interpretation. He opined that although it would be considered a sea creature, the Stincus Marinus should still indeed be considered kosher for a different reason. As although this "fish" has no true fins, still, its feet are the equivalent of fins, and accordingly, it still fits the halachic definition of a fish![12]

Rule of Thumb (or Fin)

The renowned Rav Yonason Eibeshutz, although agreeing in theory with the Pri Chodosh that Chazal's rule meant to include all aquatic life and not just fish, conjectured that possibly said rule was not meant to be absolute; rather it was meant as a generality. Generally, if a fish has scales one may assume it will also have fins; this does not exclude the possibility of ever finding one fish which does not. According to this understanding, apparently the Stincus Marinus would be considered an exclusion to the rule and therefore non-kosher. This is also the understanding of several other authorities including the Yeshuos Yaakov, the Shoel U'Meishiv, and HaKsav V'HaKabbalah.[13]

In strong contrast to this understanding of Chazal's statement, the Taz emphatically declared, "No fish in the world has scales but no fins", meaning that Chazal's rule was meant to be unconditional, and consequently, by definition there cannot be an exception. Most authorities agree to this understanding, with many of them, including the Pri Chodosh, the Chida, and the Kaf Hachaim[14] ruling accordingly that the Stincus Marinus is indeed kosher based on this, since it did actually have scales[15].

Scientifically Speaking

A scientific study published in 1840 by Rabbi Avraham Zutra of Muenster identified the Stincus Marinus as a relative of the scorpion, or a type of poisonous toad.[16] Similarly, the Chasam Sofer[17] wrote that he accepted the findings of "expert scientists" who confirmed that the Stincus Marinus is not actually a sea creature at all. Rather, it lives on the shore and occasionally jumps into the water, as does the frog. According to both of these Gedolim, our "fish" was most definitely not a fish, rather a sheretz (non-kosher crawling land animal)! This would make the entire preceding halachic discussion irrelevant, as the Stincus Marinus would not fall under the category of Chazal's statement, and would thereby be 100% non-kosher. The Kozeglover Gaon[18] actually uses this "fish" as a testament to the Divinity of the Torah, as the only known exception to Chazal's rule turned out to be not a fish at all, but rather a type of lizard!

On the other hand, not only does the Darchei Teshuva[19] not accept Rabbi Avraham Zutra's scientific study, but even writes a scathing response that he does not understand how one can place these findings from non-Halachic sources between teshuvos HaGaonim without a clear proof from Chazal or Poskim "sherak mipeehem unu chayim". Accordingly, this opinion of the Darchei Teshuva would also unsubstantiate the conclusion of the Chasam Sofer, for although the Chasam Sofer agreed to the Tosafos Yom Tov' s conclusion that the Stincus Marinus is not kosher, his claim that it is not a true sea creature is based on "scientific experts". Therefore, this scientific analysis that the Stincus Marinus be considered a lizard or scorpion, may not actually be acknowledged by all.

Practical Impracticality

The Gemara questions Chazal's rule that scales suffice to render a fish kosher, "Why then does the Torah mention fins altogether? The Gemara answers in an extremely rare fashion: "l'hagdil Torah ulha'adirah", 'to magnify and enhance the Torah[20]. The Magen Avraham in his peirush on the Yalkut Shimoni[21] takes this a step further. He writes that l'hagdil Torah ulha'adirah was not limited to the topic of fins and scales. Rather, it was also referring to our Stincus Marinus. Similar to Rashi's explanation to the famous last Mishna in Makkos[22], that Hashem wishes to

grant Klal Yisrael extra reward and He therefore added effortless Torah and Mitzvos, such as refraining from eating repulsive creatures that one wouldn't want to eat anyway. So too, by our "fish", since it is poisonous, one wouldn't have any sort of desire to eat it, thus possibly taking it out of the realm of practical halacha. Nevertheless, this whole issue of finding out its kashrus status was meant for us to delve into exclusively to get rewarded in the Next World, an infinitely more appealing approach.

So was the strange looking sea creature swimming in the ocean outside the Teivah or was it found within? It seems like we probably will never fully know the answer, although it certainly is fascinating that it seemingly would depend on how the Stincus Marinus is classified halachically!

Postscript:

Scientifically, it appears that the classification Stincus Marinus is a misnomer, as it is categorized as a lizard from the skink family, known as a Scincus Scincus, or a Sandfish Lizard. See http://runeberg.org/nfcd/0703.html. Although non-aquatic, it has been proven in the prestigious Science journal (vol. 325, July 17, 2009, in a published study by Daniel I. Goldman, "Undulatory Swimming in Sand: Subsurface Locomotion of the Sandfish Lizard") via high speed X-ray imaging that below the surface, it no longer uses limbs for propulsion but "generates thrust to overcome drag by propagating an undulatory traveling wave down the body". In other words, although deemed a lizard, it does possess fish-like characteristics, as it "swims" through the sand beneath the surface.[23]

Scientists are even trying to understand and mimic its unique abilities to help search-and-rescue missions.[24] So it is quite understandable how many of the above-mentioned Gedolim felt that the Stincus Marinus was a fish or aquatic creature, even according to those who side with the Chasam Sofer's conclusion that it is truly a sheretz ha'aretz.

[1] Parshas Noach (Ch. 7, verses 21 - 23).

[2] Midrash Rabbah (Bereishis 32, 9), cited by Rashi (Noach Ch. 7: 22, s.v. asher).

[3] The Lev Aryeh (Chullin 66b, end s.v. b'gm') seems to understand that the questioner was indeed a doctor and the moniker given was not actually referring to his name.

[4] Parshas Shmini (Vayikra Ch.11, verses 9 - 13) and Parshas Re'eh (Devarim Ch. 14, verses 9 - 10).

[5] Mishna Nida (51b) and Gemara (Chullin 66b).

[6] Rambam (Hilchos Maachalos Asuros Ch. 1, 24); Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 83, 3).

[7] Maadanei Yom Tov (Chullin 66b, 5).

[8] Mahar"i Chagiz (Shu"t Halachos Ketanos vol. 1, 255, and vol. 2, 5; cited by the Chida in Shiyurei Bracha, Yoreh Deah 83, 1), Knesses HaGedolah (Yoreh Deah 83, Haghos on Tur 6), Rav Yaakov Emden (Siddur Yaavetz, Migdal Oz, Dinei Dagim 8 & 9; quoted in the Darchei Teshuva 83, 27 - 28), Malbim (Parshas Shemini, 80; he writes that a sea creature with four legs is not considered a fish, rather a non-kosher "Chai HaYam"), and Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 83, 10).

[9] Rambam (Hilchos Maachalos Assuros Ch. 1, 24).

[10] Pri Chodosh (Yoreh Deah 83, 4).

[11] Bechor Shor (in his commentary to Chulin 66b, cited by the Darchei Teshuva ibid). He actually wrote that the whole disagreement was a colossal misunderstanding, and all opinions would agree to his understanding.

[12] There seemingly is precedent for such a theory based on the words of several Rishonim describing the Pelishti Avodah Zarah 'Dagon' (Shmuel I Ch. 5: 2 - 7), which many, including Rashi (ad loc. 2 s.v. eitzel), the Raavad (in his commentary to Avodah Zarah 41a), and R' Menachem Ibn Saruk (Machaberes Menachem; London, 1854 edition, pgs. 61 - 62) describe as a 'fish-god', meaning an idol in the shape of a fish. Yet, the Navi explicitly writes that the idol had "hands" (that were cut off). This implies that a fish's flippers or fins can indeed justifiably be called a "yad" in the Torah. See alsoRadak (Shmuel I Ch. 5:4)andTeshuvos Donash al Machberes Menachem (London, 1855 edition, pg. 58), as well as Hachraos Rabbeinu Tam (ad loc.) for alternate interpretations, including that of a hybrid half-man half-fish idol, in which case, as the top half was in human form, would have had human hands. According to this interpretation, this passage would not yield any proof to the Bechor Shor's assessment. Thanks are due to Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein for pointing out this interesting tangent.

[13] Kreisi U'Pleisi (Yoreh Deah 83, 3), Yeshuos Yaakov (ad loc. 2), Shu"t Shoel U'Meishiv (Mahadura Kamma, vol. 3, 54), and HaKsav V'HaKabbalah (in his commentary to Vayikra Ch. 11, 9).

[14] Taz (Yoreh Deah 83, 3), Pri Chodosh (ibid.), Chida (Machazik Bracha, Yoreh Deah 83, 7 and Shiyurei Bracha,Yoreh Deah 83, 1; also mentioned in his Shu"t Chaim Sha'al vol. 2, 19), and Kaf Hachaim (Yoreh Deah 83, 6 and 15).

[15] The Pri Megadim (Yoreh Deah 83, Mishbetzos Zahav 2; also writing that this seems to be the Prisha's shittah (ad loc. 7) as well; see however Mishmeres Shalom, Be"d3, who attempts to answer the Pri Megadim) and the Maharam Shick (in his commentary on the Mitzvos, Mitzva 157, cited by the Darchei Teshuva ibid.) maintain this way as well; however they do not definitively rule on the kashrus status of this "fish". The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 83, 5) as well as his son, the Torah Temima (Shemini Ch. 11: 9, 32), also held this way, that this rule is Halacha from Sinai, yet, the Aruch Hashulchan himself, still ruled that this specific "fish" non-kosher, as he considered the Stincus Marinus a sea creature, not a fish, like the Rambam. The Eretz Tzvi (see footnote 16) as well, although maintaining that it is not kosher for a different reason, writes emphatically that this rule of Chazal is absolute, and is even testimony to the Divinity of the Torah.

[16] Shomer Tzion HaNe'eman(vol. 91, pg 182), cited by the Darchei Teshuva (ibid.) without quoting the author, as well as cited in Kolmus (Pesach 5769 - Fish Story by R' Eliezer Eisikovits) without citing the source.

[17] Chasam Sofer, (commentary to Chulin daf 66b s.v. shuv).

[18] Eretz Tzvi on Moadim (Yalkut HaEmuna, Maamar Sheini, Inyan Sheini ppg. 251 - 252).

[19] Darchei Teshuva (Yoreh Deah 83, 28).

[20] Nida (51b) and Chullin (66b). For an interesting explanation of this dictum, see Lev Aryeh (Chullin 66b s.v. v'ulam).

[21] Zayis Raanan (Parshas Shemini, commentary on the Yalkut Shimoni; explanation on pg 146a). The Lev Aryeh (Chullin 66b, end s.v. b'gm') explains that it seems from the Magen Avraham's elucidation that he seems to agree with the opinion of Rav Yonason Eibeschutz that Chazal's fish rule was not meant to be absolute. For, if it was, why would the Gemara conclude that extra reward is given for staying away from a poisonous Stincus Marinus that would technically have been kosher? L'hagdil Torah ulha'adirah would only have been applicable if this "fish" turned out to be the exception to the rule, and even though it had scales was still not kosher. Accordingly, although we would avoid this "fish" because it was poisonous, we would nonetheless still attain sechar for doing so, as it would not have been deemed kosher.

[22] Gemara Makkos (23b) and Rashi (ad loc. s.v. l'zakos).

[23] A clip showcasing the sandfish lizard's amazing ability is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4bxRj-BjFg, as well as a picture of several of them preserved in a German Museum: http://i0.wp.com/themuseumtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IMAG1193.jpg.

Thanks are due to R' David Hojda for providing these fascinating links.

[24] See here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xzt1iJbwNXE&spfreload=10.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

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For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and L'Iluy Nishmas R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, and l'Zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

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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	**SPECFIC TOPIC**	**GENERAL TOPIC**
1:1-2:3	7 days of Creation	Creation of nature
2:4-3:15	the Gan Eden story	Gan Eden
3:16	Chava's **punishment**	Gan Eden
3:17-21	Man's **punishment**	Gan Eden
3:22-24	**Expulsion** from Gan Eden	Gan Eden
4:1-26	Cain's sin and **punishment**	Outside Gan Eden
5:1-31	**[Toladot:]** Adam->Noach	**Dor Ha-mabul**
5:32-6:4	Man's downfall	[pre-Mabul]
6:5-8	reason for Mabul / Hashem	[pre- Mabul]
6:9-12	reason for Mabul / Elokim	[pre-Mabul]
6:13-8:14	Punishment - the Flood	The **Mabul**
8:15-9:7	Leaving the Ark	[post-Mabul]
9:8-17	'Brit ha-keshet'	[post-Mabul]
9:18-29	Cham cursed/Shem blessed	[post-Mabul]
10:1-32	**[Toladot:]** sons of Noach	The 70 Nations
11:1-9	Builders of the Tower	Migdal Bavel
11:10-32	**[Toladot**:] Shem->Terach	Avraham Avinu
12:1-9	Avraham's **aliya**	Avraham Avinu
12:10-13:18	Lot leaves Avraham	Avraham Avinu
14:1-24	War of 4 & 5 kings	Avraham Avinu
15:1-21	Covenant/brit bein ha'btarim	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 16	Yishmael's birth	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 17	Brit mila - another covenant	Avraham Avinu

etc.

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

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

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

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

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

ENTER - 'TOLADOT'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5	**Toldot Adam** to **Noach**
6->9	-> ha-**mabul** - The story of the Flood
10	**Toldot Bnei Noach** - Shem, Cham & Yefet
11:1-9	-> **Migdal Bavel** - The Tower of Babel
11	**Toldot Shem** until **Terach**
12->25	-> God's choice of **Avraham Avinu**
25 -35	**Toldot** Yitzchak - story of Yaakov & Esav
36	**Toldot** Esav - story Esav's children
37- 50	**Toldot** Yaakov - story of Yosef & his brothers

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

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

WHAT IS A TOLADA?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TWO SECTIONS OF SEFER BREISHIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
11	Shem to Terach	leads up to Avraham Avinu
11-25	Terach	God's choice of Avraham & Yitzchak
25	Yishmael	*his 'rejection' (dechiya)
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-na'aseh **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 mizbeiach 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 **toladot**, 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 Tzfania 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 Seforno in his introduction to 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 Seforno understood this pasuk in Tzfania!!

[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 leshachein **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 briyat 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 mizbeiach at Bet-El and calls out be-**shem** Ha**shem** (12:8). After his sojourn in Egypt due to the famine, Avraham returns to this mizbeiach at Bet-El and once again calls out be-**shem** Ha**shem**! (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 aliya.

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 ver 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 Yoktan 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 seems 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 "l'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 Tirgum 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 [Hilcht 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 'streched'. 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 Seforno 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 Tzfania 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 - l'kro kulam b'shem Hashem - and to serve Him with one accord" (see Tzfania 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 l'kro b'shem Hashem...".

For a more complete explanation, simply read the entire first chapter of the Rambam in Hilchot Avoada 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 Tzfania 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 descendents 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 Yoktan ben Ever [thirteen in total] AND where they lived (see 10:25-30).

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
Menachem

Parshat No’ah: Creation Unzipped

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

QUICK REVIEW:

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

A DOSE OF REALITY:

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

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT:

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

BERESHIT 6:5-7 --
Hashem saw that the evil of Man was great in the land, and all the inclinations of the thoughts of his heart were all evil all day. Hashem regretted having made Man in the land, and He was sad in His heart. Hashem said, "I will wipe out Man, whom I have created, from upon the face of the land; from Man, to animal, to crawling animal, to bird of the sky -- for I regret having made them."

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

THE FLOOD: MANIFESTATION OF A DEEPER DESTRUCTION:

BERESHIT 6:11 --
The world was destroyed before Hashem, and the world was full of violence. Hashem saw the world, and it was destroyed, because all flesh had destroyed its path in the land.

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

PLANNING AHEAD:

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

BERESHIT 7:1-6 --
Hashem said to Noah, "Come, you and all your household, to the ark, for I see you as righteous in this generation. Of all pure animals, take seven-seven, man and wife, and of the animals which are not pure, take two, man and wife. Also of the birds of the sky, seven-seven, male and female, to keep alive seed on the face of the Earth. For in seven more days, I will rain upon the land . . . . And the Flood was water upon the Earth.

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

1) The command to bring along seven pairs of the pure animals.

2) The explanation that the animals are to be brought into the Ark in order to re-establish life on Earth.

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

THE "UNZIPPING" OF THE WORLD:

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

BERESHIT 7:6 --
. . . And the Flood was WATER UPON THE EARTH.

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

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --
Hashem said, "Let the waters be gathered from under the heavens to one place, and let the dry land be visible"; and it was so. Hashem called the dry land "Land," and called the gathering of waters "Seas"; and Hashem saw that it was good.

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

THE NEXT STEP:

BERESHIT 7:10-11 --
And it was, after those seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the land . . . . All the springs of the great deep were broken open, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

The water which becomes the Flood comes from two different sources -- 1) "the springs of the great deep," indicating the seas and other sources of water within/on the Earth and 2) "the windows of the heavens." Sources of water deep within the Earth break open and gush forth as the heavens "open" and rain pours down in torrents. The gushing froth 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 him part, is responsible for the promotion of God's order on earth.

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

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