

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 10 #2, October 28, 2022; 3 Cheshvan 5783; Noach 5783

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

---

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

---

**Mazel-Tov to Rabbi and Edna Ovadia and family in honor of their son, Yisrael Meir's upcoming wedding to Miri Alon!**

---

At the end of the parsha last week, Hashem concludes that the evil of humans has corrupted the earth. God decides to erase the world that He had created and start again with an improved plan. He tells Noach to construct a tevah and has him spend 120 years on the project, thereby giving humans an opportunity to perform teshuvah. None do so, so Hashem has Noach fill the tevah with his family and with animals to repopulate the world after the flood. God then deconstructs the world by reversing the steps He had gone through to create the world. (Rabbi Eitan Mayer's Dvar Torah, attached to the E-mail version of my posting, and also available in the archives at PotomacTorah.org, shows this pattern and explains how the recreation follows the original order.)

Rabbi David Fohrman, in a remarkable and detailed presentation of 76 videos (*Genesis Unveiled*), compares and contrasts the pre-flood and post-flood worlds. (This remarkable series presents far more insights.) He calls the pre-flood world God's world, as if man and animals are both residents. Men has limitations, such as not being able to eat meat or to eat from God's special tree. The Torah calls this world toldot ha Shemayim ve ha'aretz – the generations of the heaven and earth (both parts of God's world). After the flood, we have toldot \_\_\_\_ – generations of a series of humans, moving the story to what happens in the world of humans. In God's world, He demanded that humans follow His orders. In the world of humans, however, God promises not to destroy the world again (presenting His covenant to Noach with the rainbow as evidence).

God's order to man after the flood is "Pru u'revu u'mile'u et ha'aretz vekivshuha" – "be fruitful, multiply, and conquer the earth." The first generation of Noach's descendants, however, wants to stay in one city, build a tower to glorify themselves, and ignore the command to fill the earth. Rather than destroy the world, God mixes up the people's languages so they cannot build together, and forces them to move into separate communities. God permits mankind to make their own errors and only intervenes in minimally destructive ways.

How much can we learn from rereading 2000 years of history in two weeks every year? Rabbi Fohrman demonstrates that the Torah in these two weeks contains several instances of patterns and lessons that recur throughout the Torah. Rabbi Mayer has already shown how the pattern of creating, destroying, and recreating the world follows the same schedule – and Rabbi Fohrman adds that many words repeat in the same places. These repetitions enable us to delve into some of the depth of the Torah. Rabbi Fohrman also demonstrates that Hashem's covenant of the rainbow with Noach repeats in a pattern and with much of the same text with Shemot 31, an episode of Jews keeping Shabbat. Rabbi Fohrman also explores the meaning of rest on Shabbat. Why would God need to rest, and why was resting the way that He decides to celebrate completing creation? These insights demonstrate that the Torah provides lessons for Jews starting a thousand of years before Avraham (the first Jew) enters the scene.

My Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always taught that the Torah is a guide book on how to lead a better life. The first ten chapters of Sefer Bereshis, the material before the focus on Avraham, shows why God needed someone like Avraham to found a nation to provide a moral guide to other nations. As Rabbi Fohrman observes, if the Torah were a history book, it would have at least a chapter on the dinosaurs. However, the dinosaurs have nothing to teach humans about how to live a better life, so they do not belong in the Torah. (Perhaps there is some mention of dinosaurs in the white spaces around the columns in the Torah.) The early humans, both the righteous ones and the bad ones, can teach us how to bring ourselves close to our Creator, so they are the focus of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

---

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

---

**Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah & Alan

---

## **Dvar Torah: Noach: The World is a Symphony** by Rabbi Dovid Green © 1996

Everyone knows the story of Noah's Ark, and every culture has some form of documentation of "The Deluge". We mostly treat it as a legend, with a nice way to teach our children the names of various animals. It finds its way into our culture through art forms depicting the ark and the pairs of animals marching up the ramp into their interim home. The student of Torah knows that there is more to it than just a quaint story from antiquity.

When G-d created the world He placed man at the helm of creation. He gave us the ability to "rule" over the world. The rulership the Torah is talking about is not domination, but rather leadership. It's a major responsibility which was placed into our hands. G-d withdrew control (in a limited way) and left the world subject to the deeds of humankind.

This idea has been illustrated in terms of the world being a symphony orchestra with all of the various instruments playing in harmony. Mankind is the conductor, and everyone looks to him. When the conductor leads as he should, the orchestra works in exquisite harmony. However, should the conductor err, the potential exists for the entire orchestra to descend into the abyss of horrible dissonance. Then, needless to say, the orchestra loses its appeal.

This is the theme of the story of Noach. The conductor, humankind, acted irresponsibly. Anarchy reigned supreme. Might made right, and society broke down. On a spiritual level mankind sank, and all of the Earth which was created on his behalf sank with him. However, there was still a small pocket of sanity. It existed with Noach and his family. For that he was saved, and given the privilege of being the Father of "Mankind Act II."

In our parsha we have another familiar story known as the Tower of Babel. Among the many commentaries on this cryptic event, there are those who say the building of the tower was in order to wage a rebellion against G-d. The question which resounds is WHY? Why was the generation of the flood destroyed, and the generation who built this tower merely dispersed? The answer resounds even louder. The power of unity. The difference is clear. During the years before the flood, society broke down, and disunity reigned. Contrast that to the generation about which the Torah states "And all the

land was of one language and unity prevailing” (Genesis 11:1). Since there was peace and unity among the participants in the building of the tower, they merited to stay alive and just be dispersed.

A great Rabbi was once asked to predict the outcome of the war between Napoleon’s army and the Russians. His answer was “I’m no prophet, but I’ll tell you a story.” “A rich man riding in a magnificent carriage became mired in the mud on the poorly paved roads. A farmer driving an old rickety wagon pulled by three ponies offered his assistance. The rich man scornfully asked ‘how can your ponies do what my beautiful horses could not achieve?’ Calmly, the farmer asked ‘Where are your horses from?’ ‘Why these are bought from the greatest stables!’ ‘That explains it,’ said the farmer. ‘Your horses are unrelated. Each one fights for domination over the other three. When you hit one the others rejoice in his misfortune and don’t help in the task. My ponies are brothers, and they all pull together!’ Humbly, the rich man watched the ponies pull his coach out of the mud.” The rabbi continued. “Napoleon’s army is composed of many different ethnic groups, while the Russian soldiers are all brothers and fighting for their homeland. There is no question in my mind that the unity in the Russian army will help them in their battles.” We all know how that story ended.

The value of peace and unity are one of the many relevant lessons we learn from a parsha which is so well known, yet so misunderstood. They are achievable goals which we should all place at the top of our priorities.

Good Shabbos!

*[Ed.: How times have changed for the Russian army!]*

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5757-noach/>

---

## Unity Not Uniformity

by Rabbi Dov Linzer \* © 2015

“And from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the entire Earth” (Breishit, 11:8). What was the sin of the Tower of Babel, and why was it necessary to scatter them and create many languages? Are not geographical distance and the differences of language and culture the primary bases of misunderstanding and fear of the other? What did this people do to deserve having their unity shattered and this terrible curse brought to the world?

While many opinions have been offered in explanation, the simple sense of the verse indicates that their sin was that of unity, of being one. Immediately upon Noah’s exit from the ark God declared, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth” (9:1), but those who built the tower said, “Come ... and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (11:4, and see Rashbam there). When God looked at what they had done, God saw not only one language, but also that “the people are one.” This unity – having one language, being one people, and wanting to stay that way – was their sin. Their punishment realized God’s blessing to “fill the Earth,” and peoples were “divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations” (10:5; see also verses 21, 31-32).

We can understand why God wanted the Earth to be populated, but what is wrong with being unified, with sharing one language and one culture? We often speak of *achdus*, unity, and assume that it is an unqualified good, but is this actually the case? Certainly there is a danger when unity becomes uniformity, when dissenting voices are silenced and everyone’s thoughts, words, and actions are molded by a groupthink mentality. Those who built the tower were not only of one tongue; they were also of *devarim achadim*, which may best be translated as “of one discourse,” or as Radak puts it, “of one consensus.” To only have one discourse, to blindly commit to one ideology, may create a strong, single-minded following, but it does so at the price of crushing the individual, silencing dissent, and perverting the pursuit of truth.

Unity which is uniformity is not a good but an evil. When pursued to serve a higher purpose and not for selfish or self-serving goals, debate, dissension, and disagreement are not evil but good, a *machloket liShem Shamayim*, a debate for the sake of Heaven. This is, in fact, the very essence of Rabbinic Judaism, where minority opinions are preserved, differences are respected, and debate is valued for its own sake. In the end, the greater truth emerges: “Through such repeated asking [of the same halakhic question to multiple authorities] the two sides pay scrupulous attention to the matter and when there are times where the first one has made an error, and through this the truth of the matter will come to light” (Tosafot Niddah 20b, s.v. *Agmirei*). The greatness of Torah she’b’al Peh lies in its decentralized nature and the multiplicity of voices that have flourished and continue to flourish as a result.

With the punishment of the generation of the Dispersion and the introduction of a multiplicity of languages and cultures, the concept of difference was introduced, and new perspectives were able to germinate and grow. New ideas could enter the world. Small voices could be heard. One such voice was that of Avraham.

Avraham was a lone voice in introducing the idea of monotheism into a pagan world. The famous midrash tells us that, in his homeland, Nimrod – the leader of the tower project according to the Rabbis – could not tolerate Avraham’s heresy and tried to have him killed. The small voice of monotheism was almost silenced before it could be heard. But then Avraham travelled to a different land, one that was welcoming of him as a foreigner and prepared to hear his unconventional views. He was free to “call out in the name of the Lord”; his voice could be heard, and the Abrahamic faith began to take root and to flourish.

We have been profoundly enriched by the many cultures and perspectives that make up who we are as a nation: “The Jewish people were only scattered throughout the world so that converts could be brought into them” (Pesachim 87b). The Jewish people have lived in the United States, Canada, and Israel. They have lived in Iran, Iraq, and Yemen; in England, France, Germany, Holland, Austria, and Italy. They have lived in Morocco, North Africa, Argentina, and Venezuela. We – like the generation of the Dispersion – have been scattered throughout the Earth. We have welcomed converts from all these lands. We have remained true to the Torah and our commitments, and at the same time, we have opened ourselves to the cultures, perspectives, and intellectual pursuits of the people of these lands. Our different cultures, practices, and ideas have enriched us and deepened us: Nahar nahar u’pashtei, “Each river goes according to its flow” (Hullin 18b); diverse customs and halakhic differences are part of the beauty of our tradition.

Sadly, many today reject this approach and would like to believe that all Jews do or should look alike – white and Ashkenazi – and that all Jews should think and act in exactly the same way. Sometimes this desire expresses itself in a demand for a centralized rabbinic authority, one that would define the standard for all Jews and reject any difference of practice or opinion. This has increasingly become the reality in recent years with the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, and it has had a tragic impact on many Jews and prospective Jews, prospective converts whose very difference could so benefit the Jewish people.

This desire has also expressed itself through the importation of the attitude of “da’as Torah” into the Modern Orthodox community, and in the claim that only one standard can be practiced in communal matters, even if other practices are halakhically acceptable. The argument goes something like this: “In matters of communal policy, which are so important, should we not defer to the opinion of da’as Torah?” Of course, following one standard is fine if it happens to be the right one. But if it is the wrong one, we will all fail. Would it not be better if we encouraged multiple practices and let them play out in the free marketplace of ideas? Perhaps the best thing for the community is a practice different from the convention. Or perhaps the best thing is to have a multiplicity of practices so that the differences in our community are respected and all our different needs are addressed.

A story is told of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk. He chose not to join the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, a central rabbinic policy making council, when it was being formed. Asked why he had made this decision, he replied, “Let me tell you why. When they introduced electricity into Brisk, it was amazing. We could do away with the lamps, which were messy and costly, and our entire town is now lit by cheap, clean electricity. There is only one problem. In the past, when one person’s lamp went out, the others remained lit, and there was light throughout Brisk. Now, however, when the generator goes out, the entire town is cast into darkness.”

Let us all unite and work together to promote a committed Jewish society in which difference is valued and treasured. Through this, we will escape darkness and the truth will emerge to light.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. I am posting an archive Dvar Torah, because I did not receive a new Dvar Torah from YCT in time for my deadline this week.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2015/10/what-was-wrong-with-the-tower-of-babel/>

---

## Words of Darkness...and Words of Light: Thoughts for Parashat Noah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

It is painful to hear hateful words. Unfortunately, hardly a day goes by when we aren't confronted by statements of anti-Semitism, racism, political mud-slinging. So-called "celebrities" spout their malicious lies about Jews, about Israel, about any group they wish to slander.

Why is hateful speech so widespread?

Erich Fromm has written of the syndrome of decay that "prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction and to hate for the sake of hate." Because of their frustrations, feelings of inferiority and malignant narcissism, many people poison their own lives with hatred. Indeed, some only feel truly alive and validated when they express hatred of others.

When we hear bigots rail against "the Jews" or "the Israelis," we instinctively sense that these haters are morally blind, ignorant about Jews and Israel. When we are confronted by so-called human rights organizations and academics who malign Israel, we are appalled by their hatred and perversion of truth. Haters are dangerous. It is imperative for moral and informed people to stand up and refute the lies and calumnies.

Hateful words are uttered by many people on various rungs of the social ladder. The common denominator is their participation in the syndrome of decay. Their hatred not only erodes their own lives, it contributes to undermining the social fabric of society as a whole. It makes all good people feel uneasy. Where will this hatred lead? To spreading hatred among others? To violence?

In this week's Torah reading, God orders Noah to build an ark. Humanity had become so corrupt that the Almighty decided to destroy all but Noah and family. In providing instructions for the construction of the ark, God tells Noah: "You shall make a light for the ark" — tsohar ta'aseh latevah. Our commentators suggest that this light was a skylight window or a precious stone that could refract light throughout the ark.

A Hassidic rabbi offered a different reading of the text. The word "tevah" means ark; but it also means "word." In his homiletical interpretation, the verse should be understood as follows: "make your word generate light." When you speak, your words should be positive, encouraging, enlightening. They should contribute light to a world struggling against the forces of darkness.

Martin Buber diagnosed a serious problem within modern society. "That people can no longer carry on authentic dialogue with one another is not only the most acute symptom of the pathology of our time, it is also that which most urgently makes a demand of us." His observation relates to the breakdown of honest communication among people, especially among people outside one's immediate circle of family and friends. It also relates to the breakdown in communication among nations.

Instead of viewing ourselves as co-partners in society, the syndrome of decay leads us to view others as enemies...real or potential threats to our well-being. When we can't trust each other, when we can't speak kindly to each other or about each other, then society is afflicted with the pathology that Buber laments.

Tsohar ta'aseh latevah: each of us, in our own way, can add light and understanding to our world by speaking words of encouragement, kindness, and respectfulness. We should work toward a society that repudiates hateful words and deeds, where the haters themselves will come to see the error of their way.

Those whose words are hateful generate darkness, mistrust, societal disintegration.

Those whose words bring light to the world are humanity's only real hope.

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

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website**

**jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/words-darknessand-words-light-thoughts-parashat-noah>

---

## **The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in Combining Traditional and Academic Bible Methodologies**

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

This article, which appears in issue 15 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, is too long to reprint here. I am attaching it by E-mail to my weekly posting. See below for the web address for a pdf reprint of the article.

\* Yeshiva University and National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals ([jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org)).

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/tower-babel-case-study-combining-traditional-and-academic-bible-methodologies>

---

## **Noach – Allow Love: The Prohibition Against Theft**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

The generation of the flood was destroyed. The question is why?

The Torah tells us that they served idols. The Torah tells us that they engaged in immoral relations. But when the Torah records why they were destroyed, the Torah cites the reason of theft as the violation that decided their fate. What is so unique about the violation of theft that is more definitive a reason for destruction than the other great violations?

When we discuss the reason that Hashem created the world and mankind in particular, a principle called “bread of shame” is cited. The principle is that when someone earns reward, he or she will enjoy the reward much more profoundly than if unexplained blessing is showered upon them, spoiling them. To simply give goodness without any sense of purpose or justification would be received by a person of integrity as bread of shame.

When Hashem chose to create the world, He did so to bestow goodness upon us. For that goodness to be completely enjoyed, He set the world up in such a way that the reward must be earned. In this way we can truly enjoy the reward and each person can be genuinely proud of his or her accomplishments.

This principle makes sense and works with people who have integrity and ethical standards. A person best enjoys a bike, car, home, food, and clothing, when that item is theirs as a result of earning it. He or she may receive it as a prize for a task well done, or as a gift from someone with whom they have a genuine relationship, or as a purchase from their hard-earned savings. But for a person whose way of life is theft, this principle does not resonate. To a person who simply grabs from another person at will, the entire purpose of creation is not relevant. To such a person life is not about earning things honestly and fairly. It is not about being proud of passing the test of jealousy and earning things honestly. Earned reward is not worth any more than freebees stolen from their owner. For such a generation the purpose of creation does not have meaning.

The idea of earning reward and acquisitions — not stealing them — has great relevance in setting the stage for relationships to blossom. When we earn what we have, and respect that which other people have earned, there is room for benevolence and love. It is possible for me to give of that which I have, and it is possible for you to give of that which you have. Acts of respect and acts of kindness can occur because effort is valued and respected.

Aside from all the devastation that Communism brought upon its own citizens and to the world, Communism as a principle is a fascinating example of what occurs when the claim that effort and ownership will be negated. Rav Matisyahu Salomon observed that one of the worst effects of Communism as a theory is that it took away ownership from the individual. The

result is to deprive a person of the joy that comes from giving, both the joy of the giver and the joy of the receiver. Interestingly, in his book about Communist Russia, Elie Weisel notes with astonishment the intense sadness that he perceived in the eyes of the people he met when he visited. The people he met were forced under penalty of death or imprisonment, to subscribe to a theory devoid of personal ownership, and therefore devoid by extension of the kindness and the self-esteem that comes with personal ownership.

Respecting ownership allows us to appreciate the healthy exchange between people that occurs in healthy relationships. In the boss-worker relationship each recognizes that they contribute, and that the other contributes as well. The boss owns his money which he parts with in the form of wages, and the worker owns his time, talent, and effort, which he parts with in exchange for the wages. In fact, once ownership is recognized, the exchange can rise above the level of even-exchange and be the medium for true relationship, friendship, and even love.

Rabbi A.J. Twerski recounts how a woman in one of the recovery groups was living in an apartment building. One very cold winter the heating system broke, and it was taking a very long time for the management to get it fixed. Throughout this time the woman continued to live there suffering from the cold, but not asking any of her many friends for help.

Eventually her friends found out and it created quite a furor. "How could it be that you were living in the freezing cold and didn't tell us and let us help you?" a leader in the recovery group asked with genuine tears. The woman didn't want to "trouble" anyone, but her perspective was mistaken. A healthy awareness of ownership leads to the ability to give generously and to ask for help as well.

Hashem created the world with free choice so that we are empowered to give of ourselves of our own free choice. He granted ownership of that which we earn so that we can be gratified both in owning it, and in parting with it when appropriate. Ownership allows love to happen between people as we give of ourselves when appropriate, both physically and financially. Ownership allows self-esteem to flourish as we recognize that our decisions are ours to own, a realization which was the purpose of creation.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

---

## Parshas Noach

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\* © 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20814. Rabbi Singer's Devar Torah arrived too late for my deadline, so I am reprinting an earlier Dvar Torah from his archives.

---

## Noach: The Power of Babble

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

Genesis is the Book of Communication. Even before mankind is introduced, God creates the universe uttering words which become reality. Not only that, even the inanimate elements mentioned in the opening verses of the creation -- the heavens, the earth, the abyss, God's spirit, and the water -- are described elsewhere in the Bible as communicating through word, voice, or song, as we can see in the following verses:

*The heavens speak of God's glory and the firmament talks of His handiworks (Ps. 19:2)*

*God roars from Zion, shouts from Jerusalem, **Heaven and Earth raise their voice** (Joel 4:16)*

*Through the waves, **one abyss calls to another** (Ps. 42:8)*

***The spirit of God spoke** in me. And His word is on my tongue (II Sam. 23:2)*

The metaphors of natural phenomena talking to each other, and the concept of Divine creation through utterance, receive a renewed and much deeper meaning in modern times with the realization that life, nature, and as a matter of fact the whole universe, are engaged in constant communication -- sub-particles, DNA, genes, and viruses (and of course coding, or as they used to call it when I studied Cobol and Fortran in the late 70's – programming.)



Our immediate association of language, however, is with mankind, and indeed, the rabbis brilliantly related the creation of man to the invention of language by translating Genesis 2:7 as saying: “and man became a talking spirit.”

Since Genesis, more than any other book in the bible, deals with interactions between individuals, it provides a wealth of examples for both failed and successful communication. Among the successful ones we can count Abraham’s negotiation with God as he attempts to save Sodom, his dealing with the Hittites, his servant’s negotiation with the family of Rivka, and Joseph’s way of getting Pharaoh to grant his wishes.

The failures, unfortunately, outnumber the successes. Cain fails to communicate with his brother and eventually kills him, while God’s intervention in the dispute didn’t help much. Sarah and Hagar are unable to see eye to eye, and their relationship, with Abraham in the middle, ends in harassment and exile. Yitzhak and Rivka never talk to each other about their children, thus setting an example for them, and landing them in an entanglement of hatred and deceit which lasted centuries, if not millennia. Joseph fails to understand his brothers who, after throwing him to the pit, cannot bring themselves to talk to their father about what happened.

This is not meant to put the readers in a negative mood. After all, we can learn from failure as much as from success, if not more. The narrative of Genesis is imperative for our understanding of human nature, family dynamics, sibling rivalry, and the recognition that even the greatest human being is susceptible to errors and wrong judgment when dealing with others.

If we return now to failed communication it seems that the story of the Tower of Babel is the epitome of such failure:

*Now everyone spoke the same language and the same words... they said: “let us build a city with a tower reaching the heavens, let us make a name for ourselves or we will be scattered all over the world.”*

*God went down to see the city and tower built by men. He said: “they are one nation with one language. This is only the beginning and now they will be able to achieve all their goals. Let us scramble their language, so they will not understand each other.”*

*God scattered them all over the world, and they abandoned the construction of the city.”*

This is how Rashi (Gen. 11:7) describes the mayhem which ensued God’s intervention and His “mixing-up” man’s language:

*When a worker would ask for a brick, his co-worker would bring mortar, and that would lead to fatal quarrels.*

This Midrashic interpretation could serve as a great opener for discussing language barriers, cultural differences, and the importance of mutual understanding, whether you talk to young kids or to octogenarians (of course, without the violence element), but this famous story of the Tower of Babel raises many questions:

1. *What was the sin of the builders of the tower, why were they punished, and why was this strange punishment chosen?*
2. *Was God afraid of the prowess and intelligence of humans?*
3. *Wouldn’t it be better to disrupt their plan rather than create a linguistic mayhem, which seems to be the source of many cultural ethnic wars?*

These questions led the authors of the Midrash to describe the Tower as an act of rebellion against God, and to suggest that some of the builders used the tower as a raised platform to shoot arrows towards heaven, in an attempt to defeat

God. That version goes on to say that God played a prank on the shooters and the arrows fell back to earth covered in blood, thus making hem believe that they killed, or at least wounded, God.

### **In Defiance of Totalitarian Regimes**

Unfortunately, this approach misses the main point of the story. There was no transgression, and therefore no punishment. God was not concerned about what humans did but about what they set out to do. The two words דברים אחדים which I previously translated as “same words” should be actually read as “one ideology.” The Torah warns us of the danger in forming single-minded, authoritarian dictatorships. Governments such as now defunct Soviet Union, or current North Korea, invest heavily in military prowess and monuments, while civilians die of hunger or executed for ideological crimes.

George Orwell envisioned this terrifying possibility in his iconic *1984*, in which the government creates a uniform language – Newspeak, to eliminate all chances of free will and creative thinking:

*The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness...*

*It's a beautiful thing, the Destruction of words. Of course, the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word, which is simply the opposite of some other word?*

*In the end, we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined...*

This mentality is not restricted to tyrants and dictators, it could also be found in religious movements, educational establishments, the military, and the corporate world. The first group targeted by those who seek to establish control in any field is that of the free thinkers, artists, poets, and writers. Many religious movements allow only certified music, literature, and entertainment, if at all, and most of them demand that their followers adhere to a strict dress code and ideological dogmas.

History has proven again and again that the spirit of man, the will for freedom, cannot be subdued. We all remember great quotes, speeches, statements, and poems which moved and inspired us. For the survival of mankind, it is essential that a variety of languages, and of dialects within one language will exist, not only because they enrich the fabric of our life, but because they allow mankind to perceive the world in myriad ways and from endless angles. The variety of languages, and the innate ability of language to constantly change, help us stay in perpetuum mobile, constant movement, rather than live a life which is no more than a slide show of freeze frames.

Writes John McWorther in his thrilling natural history of language, aptly titled *The Power of Babel* (p. 16):

*Language, too, is change. All human speech varieties are always in a constant process of transformation into what eventually will be so different as to be a new language entirely. This change is certainly influenced by historical, social, and cultural conditions but it is not caused by them alone; the change would continue apace even without these things. Human speech transforms itself through time just as vigorously...*

To summarize, when the Torah says that God scrambled human languages, it was not a punishment but a gift. By doing so God gave humanity the gift of creativity and diversity, and the promise that whenever a tyrant tries to squash an idea or a thought by enforcing “one language and one ideology,” there will be those who will be able to oppose his schemes using the gift of language and ingenuity.

Shabbat Shalom. \* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now**

available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

---

## **Noach: Love, Ocean and Dove-otion**

By Dvir Cahana \*

(The following is a constructed midrash of the final days on the ark)

It was a brisk afternoon in late October. Noah looked out from his Teiva and noticed how the tips of the mountains had begun exposing their nibs through the ocean foam. These bare protrusions, a souvenir of life before the wrathful rains. The tumult from the Teiva cut through the serene empty vista. Earth immersed in a Mikvah and emerged a guiltless suckling. It was time to send out a prophet, to deliver the good word, that Hashem's judgment had been vindicated. Noah called out to Yonah, "Yonah, please be the deliverer of this good news. Go out to all those who committed chamas. Tell them that this world is forever reformed, that no such punishment will ever occur to these people again."

When Yonah heard this, Yonah was shocked. How could this be? Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Yonah wanted no part in it.

But Noah wouldn't hear another word. He took Yonah and cast him out to sea. As soon as his wings started flapping, he turned the other direction. He knew that there were mountaintops, but he couldn't fathom a God that would so quickly repeal his own dictum.

So Yonah fled, and Yonah returned empty-beaked, with no twig of which to show for. Swallowed by his temporary home, the teva, Yonah had seven days to reflect in his sukkah. Over those seven days, Yonah looked at Noah and looked back at himself. He realized that only he could be the progression to the story. The people that Noah fought against, the people of chamas, people that had the chet at the beginning. And instead of having the nun, his nun was ensconced by the mem and the somech around him. Noah was one amidst his own generation. But Yonah battled with the people of Nineveh. He saw the yud vav nun hay of them.

But he was not able to see the added nun.

The nun is the nun of the fifty gates of purity which they had achieved within themselves. Yonah saw in himself a progression from Noah. He invoked the Thirteen Middot of HaShem with the difference of the gematria between Yonah and Noah equaling that thirteen. But he did not see the thirteen middot in the chamas to the Nineveh.

He did not see how much alike he was with the rest of those around him. And so Noah cast him out one more time. After taking this deep reflection, Yonah's wings started flapping. And flapping they did all the way to Yerushalyim, where an olive branch resided on a kikayon. HaShem had provided him the opportunity to return back to Noah, to allow the judgment to dissipate and dissolve. And the evaporated water was able to return to shamayim.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Born in Goteborg, Sweden, Dvir Cahana grew up in Canada. He taught for a decade at the Satmar Yeshivat Toras Moishe, founded the Moishe House in Montreal, and started The Amen Institute, where artists and rabbis come together to inspire and create sermons and art work. He is a rabbinical student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and a graduate student at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

---

## **Shavuon Noach**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

I have a confession to make. Don't tell anyone, but I may be becoming an environmentalist. Slowly but surely, I'm starting to take pride in the fact that I can't get plastic shopping bags and have to carry my own reusable bags to the store. I'm starting to appreciate all the New Zealand laws restricting what we can and cannot do in the bush and what we can

and cannot bring into the country. I'm starting to feel relieved we only had a few lulavs this year that we kept locked up in my office. Who knows what could have been on them!

It's not that when I lived in America, I disliked nature. Far from it. I would also take a lot of hikes and spend as much time as I could there. But it was a different feeling. I didn't feel the same sense of responsibility and care that I feel now. So if I felt it necessary, I'd double on the shopping bags and plastic silverware and use a half roll of paper towels after one wash of the hands.

Perhaps in New Zealand, nature is more in your face than in America, so we care for it more.

But when I went to Rangitoto this past Monday with some fellow young adult Jews, they suggested that maybe we care more about nature here because everywhere else in the world, nature is trying to kill you or at least give you a bad rash. But in New Zealand, there is no poison ivy, rattlesnakes, or massive spidery creatures that are ready to jump on you. (I haven't been everywhere to confirm that there is zero danger, but there's definitely much less)

It's just about respect. Nature here respects and cares for us enough not to put poison leaves around, so I don't have to freak out every time my bare skin touches a plant. So I'll respect and care for it enough to use less plastic and fewer lulavs. Nature cares for me enough to want to give us some of the most beautiful fantasy-movie landscapes without bringing a machete and antivenom with me, so I'll respect it enough to use biodegradable paper towels.

Maybe in the future when I visit another country that has deadly threats surrounding me, I'll be a little less careful. Or maybe I'll have learned so much from living in NZ that I'll want to take care of nature even if it's a little more scary. But definitely for now, I feel good caring for all the beauty around us.

Plus, I'm in a way better position to understand the idea of our connection to the environment that our rabbinic predecessors expressed when they said in the Midrash that God sent the flood to cover the whole world because man's actions contaminated the whole environment, including the plants and animals. Whatever we affect affects everything. And whatever everything affects, affects us.

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

---

## **Rav Kook Torah** **Noah: The Rainbow in the Clouds**

After the Flood, God informed Noah:

*"I will make My covenant with you, and all flesh will never again be cut off by the waters of a flood.*

*"This is the sign of the covenant that I am placing between Me, you, and every living creature that is with you, for all generations: I have set My rainbow in the clouds... The rainbow will be in the clouds, and I will see it to recall the eternal covenant." (Gen. 9:11-16)*

In what way does the rainbow symbolize God's covenant, never again to destroy the world by a flood? Why does the Torah emphasize that this rainbow is "in the clouds"? And most importantly, what is the significance of this Divine promise never again to flood the world? Does this imply that the Flood was unjust? Or did God change His expectations for the world?

The rainbow is not just a natural phenomenon caused by the refraction of light. The "rainbow in the clouds" represents a paradigm shift in humanity's spiritual development.

## **Pre-Flood Morality**

Before the devastation of the Flood, the world was different than the world we know; it was younger and more vibrant. Its physical aspects were much stronger, and people lived longer lives. Just as the body was more robust, the intellect was also very powerful. People were expected to utilize their intellectual powers as a guide for living in a sensible, moral fashion. The truth alone should have been a sufficient guide for a strong-willed individual. Ideally, awareness of God's presence should be enough to enlighten and direct one's actions. This was the potential of the pristine world of the Garden of Eden.

Rampant violence and immorality in Noah's generation, however, demonstrated that humanity fell abysmally short of its moral and spiritual potential. After the Flood, God fundamentally changed the nature of ethical guidance for the human soul. The sign that God showed Noah, the "rainbow in the clouds," is a metaphor for this change.

## **Greater Moral Guidance**

The rainbow represents divine enlightenment, a refraction of God's light, as it penetrates into our physical world. Why does the Torah emphasize that the rainbow is "in the clouds"? Clouds represent our emotional and physical aspects, just as clouds are heavy and dark (the Hebrew word *geshem* means both 'rain' and 'physical matter'). The covenant of the "rainbow in the clouds" indicates that the Divine enlightenment (the rainbow) now extended from the realm of the intellect, where it existed before the Flood, to the emotional and physical spheres (the clouds). God's rainbow of light now also penetrated the thick clouds of the material world.

How was this accomplished? The Divine light became 'clothed' in a more physical form – concrete mitzvot. God gave to Noah the first and most basic moral code: the seven laws of the Noahide code. These commandments served to bridge the divide between intellect and deed, between the metaphysical and the physical.

We can now understand God's promise never again to flood the world. After the Flood, total destruction of mankind became unnecessary, as the very nature of human ethical conduct was altered. Our inner spiritual life became more tightly connected to our external physical actions. As a result, the need for such a vast destruction of life, as occurred in the Flood, would not be repeated. Of course, individuals — and even nations — may still choose to sink to the level of savages and barbarians. But the degree of immorality will never again reach the scope of Noah's generation, where only a single family deserved to be saved.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 34-36. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 318-319.)

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/NOAH59.htm>

---

## **Beyond Nature (5775, 5782)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

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."<sup>[1]</sup> 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.<sup>[2]</sup>

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."<sup>[3]</sup> 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<sup>[4]</sup> 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."<sup>[5]</sup> 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."<sup>[6]</sup>

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.

#### FOOTNOTES:

[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 McGuinness (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.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NOACH

1. Why do we need moral laws?
2. Do you think humans have a natural tendency towards good or towards evil?
3. What is the Torah teaching us about humanity from the 'reboot' of society, post-Flood?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/beyond-nature/>

---

## Noah the Pessimist

By Yossy Goldman \* © Chabad 2022

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

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

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

In the haftarah, the prophet Isaiah describes the Flood as "the waters of Noah." The Sages explain that although he was the most righteous man of his generation, Noah bore some responsibility for the Flood. Why? Because he could have



done more to persuade his contemporaries to repent and to give up their evil ways of immorality, robbery, and corruption. Noah wasn't into outreach. He just stood there building his Ark and answered questions he was asked directly, but he didn't really go out of his way to try and change the mindset of the people around him. Had he done so, he might well have changed the situation and saved the world.

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

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

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

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

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

His friend answers, "You think it's easy to be an optimist these days?!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How sad.

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

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

\* Founding director of the first Chabad in South Africa and President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

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

## **Noach: Split Second Repentance**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

Rashi explains: When G-d began the Flood, He first made it rain mercifully – as regular rain – so that if the generation would repent, the falling water would become normal, seasonal rain.

When they still did not repent, the rain became a flood. Although G-d had warned the people about the impending Flood 120 years earlier, and seeing Noah build the ark this entire period was a constant reminder of G-d's warning, the people still did not repent during that entire span of time.

Even after watching Noah enter the ark and witnessing the accompanying miracles, they still did not repent. And yet, if they had repented at this point – even after the rain started – not only would they have been spared the Flood, they would have been showered with rains of blessing.

This demonstrates the incredible power of repentance, which has the power to transform all misfortune into good, even in a split second.

– from *Daily Wisdom* #3

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

\* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

In memory of Arnold Gimpel, a"h,  
(Aharon Leib ben Mordechai)  
by his children & grandchildren

Volume 29, Issue 2

Shabbat Parashat Noach

5783 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### The Light in the Ark

Amid all the drama of the impending Flood and the destruction of almost all of creation, we focus on Noah building the ark, and hear one detailed instruction: Make a tzohar for the ark and terminate it within a cubit of the top. (Gen. 6:16)

There is a difficulty understanding what "tzohar" means, since the word does not appear anywhere else in Tanach. Everyone agrees that it is referring to a source of illumination. It will give light within the ark itself. But what exactly is it? Rashi quotes a Midrash in which two Rabbis disagree as to its meaning: Some say this was a window; others say that it was a precious stone that gave light to them.[1]

The precious stone had the miraculous quality of being able to generate light within the darkness.

Bartenura suggests that what is at stake between the two interpretations is the etymology of the word tzohar itself. One relates it to the word tzaharayim, meaning "midday." In that case, the brightness was to come from the sun, the sky, the outside. Therefore tzohar means "a window, a skylight." The other view is that tzohar is related to zohar, "radiance," which suggests something that radiates its own light, hence the idea of a miraculous precious stone.

Chizkuni and others suggest Noah had both: a window (from which he later released the raven, Gen. 8:6) and some form of artificial lighting for the prolonged period of the Flood itself when the sun was completely overcast by cloud and the world was shrouded in darkness.

It remains fascinating to ask why the Rabbis of the Midrash, and Rashi himself, would spend time on a question that has no practical relevance. There will be – God promised this in this week's parsha – no further flood. There will be no new Noah. In any future threat to the existence of the planet, an ark floating on the water will not be sufficient to save humankind. So why should it matter what source of illumination Noah had in the ark during those tempestuous days? What is the lesson for the generations?

I would like to offer a midrashic speculation. The answer, I suggest, lies in the history of the Hebrew language. Throughout the biblical era, the word *tevah* meant an ark – large in the case of Noah and the Flood, small in the case of the papyrus basket coated with tar in which

Yocheved placed the baby Moses, setting him afloat on the Nile (Ex. 2:3). More generally, it means "box." However, by the time of the Midrash, *tevah* had come also to mean "word."

It seems to me that the Rabbis of the Midrash were not so much commenting on Noah and the ark as they were reflecting on a fundamental question of Torah. Where and what is the tzohar, the brightness, the source of illumination, for the *tevah*, the Word? Does it come solely from within, or also from without? Does the Torah come with a window or a precious stone?

There were certainly those who believed that Torah was self-sufficient. If something is difficult in Torah it is because the words of Torah are sparse in one place but rich in another.[2] In other words, the answer to any question in Torah can be found elsewhere in Torah. Turn it over and turn it over for everything is within it.[3] This is probably the majority view, considered historically. There is nothing to be learned outside. The Torah is illuminated by a precious stone that generates its own light. This is even hinted at in the title of the greatest work of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar* (see Bartenura above).

There were, however, other views. Most famously, Maimonides believed that a knowledge of science and philosophy – a window to the outside world – was essential to understanding God's word. He made the radical suggestion, in the *Mishnah Torah* (*Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:2), that it was precisely these forms of study that were the way to the love and fear of God. Through science – the knowledge of "He who spoke and called the universe into existence" – we gain a sense of the majesty and beauty, the almost infinite scope and intricate detail of creation and thus of the Creator. That is the source of love. Then, realising how small we are and how brief our lives in the total scheme of things: that is the source of fear.

The case Maimonides made in the 12th century, long before the rise of science, has been compounded a thousand times with our accelerated knowledge of the nature of the universe. Every new discovery of the vastness of the cosmos and the wonders of the micro-cosmos, fills the mind with awe. "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?" (Is. 40:26).

Maimonides did not think that science and philosophy were secular disciplines. He believed that they were ancient forms of Jewish wisdom, that the Greeks had acquired from the Jews and sustained at a time when the

Jewish people, through exile and dispersion, had forgotten them. So they were not foreign borrowings. Maimonides was re-claiming a tradition that had been born in Israel itself. Nor were they source of independent illumination. They were simply a window through which the light of God's created universe could help us decode the Torah itself. Understanding God's world helps us understand God's word.

This made a significant difference to the way Maimonides was able to convey the truth of Torah. So for example, his knowledge of ancient religious practices – albeit based on sources that were not always reliable – afforded him the deep insight (in *The Guide for the Perplexed*) that many of the *Chukim*, the statutes, the laws that seem to have no reason, were in fact directed against specific idolatrous practices.

His knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy enabled him to formulate an idea that exists throughout both Tanach and the rabbinic literature, but that had not been articulated so clearly before, namely that Judaism has a virtue ethic. It is interested not just in what we do but in what we are, in the kind of people we become. That is the basis of his pathbreaking *Hilchot De'ot*, "Laws of ethical character."

The more we understand the way the world is, the more we understand why the Torah is as it is. It is our roadmap through reality. It is as if secular and scientific knowledge were the map, and Torah the route.

This view, articulated by Maimonides, was developed in the modern age in a variety of forms. Devotees of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch called it *Torah im derech erez*, "Torah with general culture." In Yeshiva University it came to be known as *Torah u-Madda*, "Torah and science." Together with the late Rav Aaron Lichtenstein zt"l, I prefer the phrase *Torah ve-Chochmah*, "Torah and wisdom," because wisdom is a biblical category.

Recently, the science writer David Epstein published a fascinating book called *Range*, subtitled, *How Generalists Triumph in a Specialised World*. [4] He makes the point that over-concentration on a single specialised topic is good for efficiency but bad for creativity. The real creatives, (people like the Nobel prize winners), are often those who had outside interests, who knew other disciplines, or had passions and hobbies outside their

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:  
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350  
or email: [sgreenberg@jhu.edu](mailto:sgreenberg@jhu.edu)  
<http://torah.saadia.info>

subject. Even in a field like sport, for every Tiger Woods, who had a feel for golf even before he could speak, there is a Roger Federer, who exercised his skills in many sports before, quite late in youth, choosing to focus on tennis.

Lhavdil, it was precisely Maimonides' breadth of knowledge of science, medicine, psychology, astronomy, philosophy, logic, and many other fields that allowed him to be so creative in everything he wrote, from his letters, to his Commentary to the Mishnah, to the Mishnah Torah itself, structured differently from any other code of Jewish law, all the way to *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides said things that many may have sensed before, but no one had expressed so cogently and powerfully. He showed that it is possible to be utterly devoted to Jewish faith and law and yet be creative, showing people spiritual and intellectual depths they had not seen before. That was his way making a *tzohar*, a window for the *tevah*, the Divine word.

On the other hand, the *Zohar* conceives of Torah as a precious stone that gives light of itself and needs none from the outside. Its world is a closed system, a very deep, passionate, moving, sustained search for intimacy with the Divine that dwells within the universe and within the human soul.

So we are not forced to choose either the one or the other. Recall that Chizkuni said that Noah had a precious stone for the dark days and a window for when the sun shone again. Something like that happened when it came to Torah also. During the dark days of persecution, Jewish mysticism flourished, and Torah was illuminated from within. During the benign days when the world was more open to Jews, they had a window to the outside, and so emerged figures like Maimonides in the Middle Ages, and Samson Raphael Hirsch in the 19th century.

I believe that the challenge for our time is to open a series of windows so that the world can illuminate our understanding of Torah, and so that the Torah may guide us as we seek to make our way through the world.

[1] Genesis Rabbah 31:11.

[2] Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 3:5.

[3] Mishnah Avot 5:22.

[4] David Epstein, *Range*, Macmillan, 2019.

---

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

---

Noah may have been righteous and wholehearted as an individual, but he lacked the strength and the boldness to confront God's decision and to oppose the wicked ways of the world.

"Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noah walked together with God" (Gen. 6:9)

If, indeed, Noah was a righteous, wholehearted partner of God, why is he not the first Hebrew?

He seems to have had all of the necessary qualifications.

The classical biblical commentary Rashi generally follows the midrash in praising every one of the biblical personalities, even those who do not come off so well in a simple reading of the biblical text. In the case of Noah, however, Rashi cites a midrash that turns great praise into shameful degradation.

While the Bible states unambiguously that Noah was "a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations," Rashi comments,

"And there are those who explicate this phrase to Noah's detriment: In accordance with his generation, he was righteous; had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered anything at all" (Rashi, citing BT Sanhedrin 108).

Why this denigration when the Bible itself is so complimentary? Rashi and the midrash even take the next phrase,

"He [Noah] walked together with God," to indicate that Noah was lacking: "In the case of Abraham, the Bible says, 'Walk before Me and be wholehearted' (Gen. 17:1). Noah required Divine support to uphold him, whereas Abraham was strong and progressed with his righteousness on his own [without any need of external support]" (Gen. Raba 30:10).

What could possibly cause these commentaries to overlook the positive and seek out the negative? The Maharal of Prague magnificently explains that Abraham and Noah each faced a similar challenge, but they reacted in radically different ways.

When God informs Abraham that he is going to destroy the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham immediately challenges the decision and actually debates with the Lord Himself:

"Will You then destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are 50 righteous... will You destroy and not forgive the place because of those 50 righteous... [should] the Judge of the entire earth not act justly?... And perhaps there are 45... or 40... or 30... or 20... or 10?" (Gen. 18:23-32)

Abraham charges God with injustice and then bargains with God as if the Almighty were a market vendor, in order to save the wicked city of Sodom.

But Noah, when confronted with the prospect of a flood destroying all of humanity, is quite satisfied to accept God's decision and build an ark to save only himself and his immediate family. Apparently the first Hebrew must be concerned for all of humanity. Noah's lack of human sensitivity left him wanting in God's eyes. That's precisely what the midrash says: Had Noah lived in Abraham's generation and

## Likutei Divrei Torah

been compared to him, he would not have been considered anything at all.

It goes even further than that, however. God actually gives in to Abraham's demand. He says specifically,

"I will not destroy [Sodom] because of even 10 righteous people" (Gen. 18:32).

But as the Torah reports, there were not even 10 righteous in the city:

"The men of Sodom surrounded the house [to sodomize the strangers], from the youth to the aged, the entire people from end to end [of the city]" (Gen. 19:4).

God even invites Abraham to enter into dialogue with Him, saying,

"Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17)

God then goes on to declare that He has elected Abraham as the first Hebrew because of his sense of justice and righteousness, before inviting Abraham to argue with Him on the basis of these concepts (Gen. 18:18-22).

The point is clear: To be the elected of God, one must stand strong against the injustices of the world. God recognizes that the world is not perfect; He wants us to complete and perfect it. He wants us to force Him to intercede to make certain that the good and the compassionate triumph over the evil and the destructive. He doesn't want us to accept the world as He created it; He doesn't want us to accept human nature in the fullness of its evil potential. Noah apparently did not believe that humanity had the power to repent. Abraham believed that even Sodom was ultimately redeemable.

Noah may have been righteous and wholehearted as an individual, but he lacked the strength and the boldness to confront God's decision and to oppose the wicked ways of the world. This characteristic is built into his name, which means "ease." Rashi says that he received that name because he created an easier method of reaping wheat from the ground. God elects the one who challenges Him and is willing to go to war to fight the evil terrorists who captured Lot. God wants us to swim against the current, to put our lives on the line, in order to perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine. That's what it means to be a Hebrew (*Ivri*): to stand in opposition on one side (ever in Hebrew), even if everyone – even God – stands on the other.

---

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

---

#### **Connecting the Dots**

Only a few of the games that I played during my childhood are still popular today. One of them is "connect the dots." Nowadays, it comes in some very sophisticated and complex versions. But I remember it from the days in

which we were given coloring books and instructed to connect several dozen numbered dots in sequence. We were delighted to discover that what initially appeared to be just randomly scattered spots on the page eventually emerged as coherent images.

Although the game was simple enough for even the very young, the idea behind it is a very profound one. The ability to make order out of chaos is by no means child's play. It is a necessary feature of life and, as I hope to demonstrate in this week's column, it is an important aspect of Torah study.

I first learned of the power of the metaphor of "connecting the dots" from a gentleman who has since become one of my dearest friends. He was a newcomer to my synagogue. I soon noticed that he regularly sat in one of the front pews and listened very attentively to my sermons. Eventually, he approached me and gave me one of the most cherished compliments I have ever received. He said, "Many rabbis give excellent sermons and fill their presentations with dazzling and inspiring ideas. But they fail to connect the dots between those ideas. They rarely explain how those ideas relate to each other and to real life. You, however, connect the dots. Yasher koach."

I am thankful to that gentleman to this day, for now when I prepare a sermon, I ask myself one question before I deliver it: "Did you connect the dots?"

One of the ways in which I personally continue to play "connect the dots" to this day is by attempting to connect some of the words and thoughts we have during the sacred day of Yom Kippur to events that occur during the ensuing calendar year. For example, on Yom Kippur we recite a prayer in which we wonder aloud, "Who will live, and who will die... Who will have a tranquil year, and who will have a year of suffering?" As the year progresses, we indeed discover for whom death was destined, and for whom a year of suffering lays in store. By the year's conclusion, we learn who lived and who experienced good fortune. But seldom do we "connect the dots" between the words we uttered somberly on Yom Kippur and the events which occurred months, sometimes many months, later.

Permit me to present a different sort of "dot" upon which I pondered this past Yom Kippur, when we read the book of Jonah in the late afternoon of that day. My question was one which has been asked even by casual readers of the fascinating story of this Jewish prophet who was sent by the Lord to prophesize to the city of Nineveh, the capital of Ashur, or Assyria. Jonah, to say the least, does everything he can to resist the Lord's command that he grant prophecy to a city populated by a nation that is a historic enemy of the Jewish people. Jonah eventually delivers his message to Nineveh, informing them that their great

city will be overturned unless they repent. Jonah's worst fear comes true—they do indeed repent, sincerely and totally.

Who were these people of Nineveh that they took a stranger's word as a signal to change their entire society and reform their system of justice? This audience, to Jonah's chagrin, was exceptionally and immediately obedient. What was it in their history and background that readied them to hear Jonah's message and to take it seriously?

The answer lies in a brief phrase in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Noach (Genesis, 6:9-11:32), as explicated by Rashi. The verse occurs toward the end of the parsha, where the Torah enumerates the progeny of Noah. We learn that he had a grandson named Cush, and that "Cush also begot Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. He was a mighty hunter... The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon... and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From that land Ashur, went forth, and built Nineveh..." (Genesis 10:8-11).

It is fair to assume that most readers of these verses pass them over and consider them mere chronological details. But Rashi characteristically teaches us to read each verse very carefully, however trivial it may seem. He wonders not only about why the Torah mentions Ashur's departure from mighty Nimrod's territory, but also about the motive Ashur had for doing so.

Mindful of the fact that our Sages viewed Nimrod as the quintessential tyrant who instigated the construction of the Tower of Babel (of which we read in chapter 11 of this week's Torah portion), Rashi writes, "Ashur noticed that his children were listening to Nimrod's teachings and were ready to join the rebellion against God which the Tower of Babel signified." When Ashur realized that his children were falling sway to the malicious influence of the first tyrant in history, he decided to swiftly flee to another land.

One must admire Ashur's courage. He was ready to abandon his family and his society because he discerned the direction in which they were heading. We know how difficult it would be for any of us to uproot ourselves from our community just because we fear the negative influence that community would have upon our children. Ashur did so and remains a hero, albeit a relatively unsung hero.

Now, let us "connect the dots." Many centuries after Ashur courageously escaped Nimrod's evil empire and laid the foundations of his own city of Nineveh, that city degenerated into corruption. Over the generations, they forgot the lesson of their founder and ancestor Ashur.

But our tradition teaches us that the noble teachings of ancestors are never totally forgotten. Even when we intentionally try to

## Likutei Divrei Torah

suppress the lessons of our forebears, they lie dormant within us, just beneath the surface.

One can presume that the Almighty had Ashur's heroic precedent in mind when, as He observed the moral deterioration of the Nineveh of Jonah's time, He decided to grant them the favor of Jonah's prophecy and to give them the opportunity to mend their ways.

One can further presume that it was Ashur's lesson to his descendants that endured for centuries (which eventually resurfaced in their consciences) and that motivated them to repent so rapidly and with such ease.

There are many lessons to be learned from Ashur's behavior and from the impact it had upon his children's children. One is the need to remove oneself, however possible, from the negative influences which surround him. Another lesson is to appreciate the power that the actions one performs in his lifetime has upon his offspring.

There is a lesson also to be learned about the "dots" that are scattered, mostly unnoticed, all over our holy Torah. We have just connected the "dot" in this week's Torah portion in the book of Genesis with the "dot" in the much later biblical book of Jonah. We connected a Torah portion read early in the month of November with a text we read about a month prior on Yom Kippur. It is incumbent upon us to be such careful students of the entire Torah that we can learn to connect many other such "dots."

As the Talmud says, "The words of the Torah are 'poor' in one place but 'rich' in another." It is by connecting the "poor" dots to the "rich" ones that we can begin to fully appreciate the perfection of our tradition.

---

### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand** **A Tale of Two Teivah Riders: Noach's Gilgul Corrects His "Small Believer" Shortcoming**

It is not easy to completely characterize the hero of this week's parsha. Avrohom Avinu was a Tzadik. Yitzchak Avinu was a Tzadik. Yaakov Avinu was a Tzadik. The characterization of Noach is less cut and dry. The pasuk does acknowledge his Tzidkus: "... Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations..." [Bereshis 6:9]. The fact that the Torah writes such about Noach is, of course, in and of itself, a great accolade. And yet, there is something very perplexing about the personality of this individual, whose family were the sole human survivors of the Deluge.

The pasuk states: "And Noach and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons came into the Teivah, because of the flood waters (mipnei mei haMabul)." [Bereshis 7:7]. Rashi infers from the words mipnei mei haMabul that "Noach, too, was one of those with little faith 'm'katnei Amanah" – he believed but he did not fully believe."

We may talk about a person who is a great ma'amin (believer). Noah was apparently not a great ma'amin! Despite what he was told by Hashem, he did not enter the Teivah until he had no choice but to do so because of the onslaught of the torrential rains. Up until the last minute, he was hedging his bets and hesitated to enter the Teivah.

How do we reconcile this status of being a "small believer" with the pasuk's earlier description of Noah as "Ish Tzadik, Tamim haya b'Dorosav"?

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was universally known for his uncanny ability to be melamed zechus on Klal Yisrael – always putting a positive spin on their actions, and defending them from accusations of spiritual laxity on their part. (He would take any situation and find a positive aspect about apparently incriminating behaviors. The classic story is that he came across a Jew greasing the axles of his wagon while wearing tefillin. Others recoiled at that sight: "How dare you wear tefillin while engaging in such unseemly labor?" Reb Levi would smile and say with satisfaction – "Ahh, look at this holy Jew. Even when he is greasing the axles of his wagon, he still wears tefillin!") Such was the personality and philosophy of life of the great Chassidic master, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. If there was anyone who would be able to justify Noah's actions and could reconcile these seemingly contradictory facets, it would be Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev.

Indeed, in his sefer Kedushas Levi he writes that Noah was a great Tzadik. He interprets the expression "m'katnei Amanah" (a small believer) to mean that Noah did not believe in himself. He did not see himself as a Tzadik. Reb Levi Yitzchak explains that there are two types of Tzadikim. There is a Tzadik who feels confidence in his righteousness and he knows that "Tzadik gozer v'HaKadosh Baruch Hu Mekayem" (The Almighty follows the orders, so to speak, of a Tzadik). He knows that a Tzadik has incredible powers and can in fact – as it were – overrule the Master of the Universe!

As to the "complaint" against Noah – why did he not pray for his generation (as, for example, Avraham prayed for the salvation of Sodom) and ask that the decree of the Flood be annulled – Reb Levi Yitzchak explains, that is what is meant by "Noah was a small believer". He did not see himself as any better than the people of his generation. Simply, he did not realize that he had the credentials to petition the Almighty to annul this decree! "On the contrary," writes Rev Levi Yitzchak, "he considered himself to be just another member of the "Dor haMabul." Consequently, he reasoned – "if I am going to be saved from this Flood, the other people in the generation will be saved as well, because I am no better than they are!"

"M'katnei amanah" does not mean that he had insufficient faith in the Word of G-d, but rather that he did not have the confidence and Emunah in himself. That is why he waited when the water was up to his ankles and then up to his knees and up to his thighs before entering into the Teivah at the last minute.

This attitude on his part explains many of Noah's actions, that might imply criticism:

Why did he not pray for his generation? It is because his attitude was "Me? The Master of the Universe should listen to me? Why would my prayers be worth anything? Who am I?"

This approach reconciles how Noah could at the same time be an "Ish Tzadik – Tamim haya b'dorosov" and on the other hand also "M'katnei ha'Amanah". This is a different interpretation of the idea "M'Katenei ha'Amanah."

I heard this vort from my wife who heard it from Rabbi Shmuel Silber at his shiur this morning. However, Rabbi Silber added two additional points:

There is a kabbalistic concept of Gilgulim (soul transmigrations). A person enters this world with a job to do. If he does not fulfill his assigned mission, his soul is "recycled" so to speak and returns to this world in another body to be given a "second chance" to fulfill that mission. It is written in the "heilege sefarim" (holy books) that Moshe Rabbeinu was a Gilgul of Noah.

Moshe served as the "tikkun" (corrective action) for Noah. Moshe Rabbeinu was the most modest person on the face of the earth and yet he believed in himself and he believed in the power of his personal prayer. When the Ribono shel Olam said "I will destroy them (the Jewish people) in a moment" (Achaleh osam c'regah), by the aveyra of the Egel Hazahav (Golden Calf) or by other sins, Moshe stood up and fought to defend Klal Yisrael. This was the Tikkun of the Neshama of Noah through the personage of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The second point Rabbi Silber added was that we begin our day with the prayer: Modeh Ani Lefanecha, Melech Chai v'Kayam she'he'chezarta bee nishmasi b'chemlah, Rabbah Emunasecha! What is the meaning of the expression "Rabbah Emunasecha"? Rabbi Silber suggested that perhaps it can be interpreted as "You have so much faith in me!" I woke up again this morning. Why? It must be because You think I can do the job. Your Emunah in me is so great that You return my soul every single morning, manifesting Your confidence in my ability to fulfill my mission in life.

As modest and as humble as a person must be, nevertheless he must have self-confidence (emunah Atzmis).

## Likutei Divrei Torah

There is a sefer Shaarei haAvodah (some say it is written by Rabbeinu Yona in the 1200s) which notes that the first Bracha of the Shmoneh Esrei invokes the Supreme Power who is "Elo-kei Avraham, Elo-kei Yitzchok, v'Elo-kei Yakov". The Shmoneh Esrei is known as Avodah (service). The first thing we must remind ourselves when we start our job of Divine Service is that "I have a distinguished lineage (yichus)! I descend from Gedolim! I am a Rebbishe Einkele! (Grandchild of a Holy Rabbi)." My Zeida was Avraham. My Zeida was Yitzchok. My Zeida was Yaakov. I am a somebody. I am not a nobody. A person must know that.

True, a person cannot have the attitude "It is my strength and the power of my hand that is responsible for my great wealth." [Devorim 8:17] But a person needs to have faith in who he is and what he can do. This was the shortcoming of Noah, which was corrected by Moshe Rabbeinu.

### The Pleasant Aroma of Mesiras Nefesh

I saw the following observation in a sefer called Nachlas Eliezer.

The pasuk says: "And Noah build a Altar for Hashem..." [Bereshis 8:20] When Noah emerged from the Teivah, he built an Mizbayach and offered korbonos (sacrifices). The Medrash Rabbah [34:9] comments on the fact that the Torah uses the word VaYiven (he built) rather than Va'Ya'as (he made) in connection with the Altar. The Medrash explains that the reason for the choice of the word VaYiven is because it can also be read as VaYaven, meaning "he understood" (etymologically related to the words binah and havanah, which mean 'understanding').

What did Noah understand? He understood why Hashem had commanded him to take more Kosher animals (7 pairs of each) onto the Teivah than non-kosher animals (1 pair of each). He understood that the reason was so that there would be "extra" Kosher animals from which to bring korbonos upon leaving the Teivah. So "VaYaven" (he understood) and "VaYiven" he built an Mizbayach immediately upon exiting from the Teivah. So says the Medrash.

There is a second on the very next pasuk. The pasuk begins "Hashem inhaled the pleasant aroma (Reiach haNichoach)..." [Bereshis 8:21]. The Medrash says that the reference here is to much more than merely smelling the roasted meat. The Medrash says that Hashem smelled the aroma of Avraham Avinu rising up from the Fiery Furnace into which he was thrown (for having broken his father's idols). The Medrash continues that Hashem also smelled in Noah's offering the aroma of Chananya, Mishael, and Azariah who were also thrown into a Fiery Furnace [Daniel Chapter 3] for refusing to bow down to the idol of Nevuchadnezer, King of Bavel.

Why did the Ribono shel Olam see or smell, as it were, the Mesiras Nefesh aroma of Avraham and the Mesiras Nefesh aroma of Chananya, Mishael, and Azariah in the korbonos of Noach?

The sefer Nachlas Eliezer writes that Noach did something over here that was very significant. The Ribono shel Olam told him to take 7 pairs of Kosher animals and only a single male-female pairing of the non-Kosher animals. Noach asked himself why. For the same money, he could have hypothesized that the purpose of ensuring a surplus of Kosher animals was to allow him to eat. He could have concluded “HaShem wanted me to be able to eat steak every night as a reward for my efforts!” Why then, did Noach assume that the reason for the surplus of kosher animals was that the Ribono shel Olam wanted korbanos? It is because when looking at the situation, Noach, rather than seeing his own needs, saw – as it were – Hashem’s “needs”. He put his pleasures and appetite and desires aside. He said, “No! Seven pairs are not for me! They are for the Ribono shel Olam.”

That self-denial, that small act of thinking about the big picture – something beyond oneself – was the first step of Mesiras Nefesh. Given the context of the Dor HaMabul – a generation that was into self-gratification and each person’s own pleasure – Noach took a step in the opposite direction. “No, I am not going to go ahead and enjoy myself. I am going to take those same animals that I could have eaten myself and sacrifice them to the Almighty. The Ribono shel Olam “smelled” in the aroma of that korban the Mesiras Nefesh of later generations: Of Avraham Avinu and of Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya. Their dedication and self-sacrifice grew out of this small act of Noach at the dawn of mankind.

People throw around the expression “Mesiras Nefesh” all the time. “It was raining and I came to the Chassanah – Ah! What Mesiras Nefesh!” “I drove two and a half hours to Lakewood to such and such — What Mesiras Nefesh!” Frankly, I used to be put off by such language, thinking that it was a cheapening of a term reserved for real self-sacrifice and self-deprivation.

Someone corrected me and explained that the expression Nefesh in Tanach can have a secondary meaning as well, as in the phrase “Im Yesh es Nafshechem” [Bereshis 23:8] (if it so be your desire). Mesiras Nefesh means that I put away my desire. I don’t want to get wet at night. I don’t want to schlep out on a cold winter night to attend somebody’s Chassanah. I would rather stay home in my cozy house. Going out requires “Mesiras Nefesh” because I give over my Ratzon, my desires, on behalf of someone else. A person does not need an act of martyrdom or self-sacrifice to be Moser Nefesh. A small act may also be Mesiras Nefesh. That is exactly what Noach did here.

“I could have eaten these things, but I gave them to the Ribono shel Olam.”

That act modeled a behavior and had an affect such that ten generations later, Avraham Avinu was truly Moser Nefesh and scores of generations later, Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya, were literally Moser Nefesh allowing themselves to be cast into a Fiery Furnace rather than bowing down to an idol.

The other offshoot from this lesson is how an act of a human being can have an effect so many generations later. Towards the end of the parsha, the Torah writes “And Kush gave birth to Nimrod, he began to be a mighty man on earth. He was a mighty hunter before Hashem...” [Bereshis 10:8-9]. We would assume that this pasuk is describing a fellow, Nimrod, who was a real mighty individual – a strong and muscular hunter. Rashi says that the pasuk is referring to something entirely different. Rashi describes Nimrod as a rebel – one who led a rebellion against the Master of the Universe. Rashi says that the pasuk is referring to any person (in future generations) who is disrespectful to the Almighty, so to speak, “who recognizes his Master and intends to rebel against Him”. Such a person can be titled “a Nimrod.”

Look at the next pasuk. “From this land came forth Ashur and built Nineveh, Rechovoth-ir, and Calah.” (Bereshis 10:11) A fellow named Ashur, after whom the nation and country is named (Assyria) came forth and built several cities. On the words “From this land came forth Ashur” Rashi writes: Ashur saw that his children were following in the path of Nimrod (rebellious against G-d). His reaction was “I’m out of here!” He left that land because he didn’t want to have anything to do with Nimrod and his influence. “I am not going to let Nimrod corrupt my children.” So, he went to a new land and he built for himself cities – among which was the City of Nineveh. The modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq is the ancient city of Nineveh.

Fast forward dozens of generations. There is a prophet named Yonah who goes to the city of Nineveh and gets on a soapbox. He proclaims “In forty days, the City of Nineveh will be overturned.” (Yonah 3:4) At Hyde Park in London or to Times Square in New York City there are people on soapboxes speaking to crowds. Many proclaim that the world is about to be destroyed. We usually call such people “Nuts!” No one gives these people a hoot of attention. They are Mishugaim!

Here Yonah comes to Nineveh; he gets up on a soapbox and announces that the city will be destroyed in less than six weeks. What happens? They listen to him. The whole city does Teshuva. The King of Nineveh repents. The animals repent. How did Yonah pull this off? How did he do it?

## Likutei Divrei Torah

He was able to pull this off because it was Ashur who founded Nineveh. Ashur started Nineveh because he said “I am not going to let my sons be influenced by people who rebel against the Ribono shel Olam.” Because of the motivations of its founder, Nineveh was always karov l’Teshuva (having an affinity for repentance). Just like the act of Noach denying himself the pleasure of those steaks had an effect, such that ten generations later, Avraham Avinu was willing to become a martyr for the sake of Hashem and the same was true hundreds of years later with Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya. So too, the act of Ashur abandoning the wicked Nimrod and building a new city for his children, had an affect on the spiritual DNA of Nineveh’s occupants so many generations later – such that they all did Teshuva upon hearing Yonah’s warning.

---

### Dvar Torah

#### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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 “kiyme Noah,” – “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 Noah,” – “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 Noah,” – “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.

---

**Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel**  
**Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

---

**How To Achieve Eternity and Live Forever**

When God forbade man in last week's Torah Portion to eat the of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, He says in the verse that the day you will eat that fruit you will die (**Genesis 2:17**). The commentaries discuss if this signifies that man will eventually die when he could have lived forever, or that man was destined to live past one thousand years, and, as a result of the sin, he will not do so. In any event, man's relationship with death changed forever because of that sin. If we search the innuendos and hints in the text, we will see that after the sin, many people focused on trying to live forever, despite God's forecast that every human being must succumb to. This question is not limited to their day. How can many live forever, even though each man and woman must physically die? This is a question that many people alive today ask as well, trying to achieve immortality and eternity. How does man attain immortality beyond one's bodily death? Today, some people still seek this goal, either through scientific knowledge to keep them alive as long as possible, or by cryogenics. But his has not proved to be a viable solution. What does the Torah tell us?

**Attempts to Keep One's Name Alive Even After Physical Death**

After the sin by Adam and Eve, their eldest son, Kayin, also sinned by killing his brother Hevel. God says that Kayin's punishment would force him to wander the land, never having permanence (**Genesis 4:12 and repeated in verse 14**). This was indeed a continuation of the retribution to Kayin's parents (death), as the punishment of impermanence and lack of eternity is indeed a fitting retribution for the destroying the life of Hevel permanently. But then Kayin defied God, and built a (permanent) city to live in, and named it after his son, Chanoch (**Genesis 4:17**). It is clear that Kayin was trying to give his son permanence and immortality by establishing the first city in his name, which would live on beyond Chanoch's lifetime. Everyone would remember Chanoch for thousands of years, each time they visited and through of the city. Many cities since Chanoch have been built and named for people, but, even today, almost no one thinks of that person, even when they live in the city. The name of the city Kyiv was for Kyi, one of two bothers and a sister. George Vancouver helped

build his city, but few people think about this person or any other's city's namesake when they enter or leave it.

Then, at the end of our Parsha (**Genesis 11:1-11**), there is the story of the group of people when thought they could attain permanence and eternity by using the new "permanent building materials called brick and mortar," and built a tower challenging God. There are many explanations in the commentaries about their goals, but the text does tell us that "they wanted to make a (permanent) name for themselves." Kli Yakar explains that each of their actions was taken so that they would be looked up to and remembered for all time, i.e., immortality. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are many people who think they will be remembered and attain eternity by putting their names on towers. A former president, at one time, had ten buildings with the name Trump Tower. Today, only one remains, and that one may not outlast even his own lifetime. And the people who built the Tower of Babel in our Parsha? The Torah does not name even one of them, and they died anonymously. So, building towers does not seem to help people eternity or immortality.

**How, then, Can a Human Being Attain Immortality and Continue to Live After Death?**

The beginning of an answer to our question is tucked away in two "by the way" comment by Rashi, one on the very first verse in the Parsha and one on the very last verse. Normally the word "*Toldot*" signifies children. Thus, when the Parsha begins with the words "these are the *Toldot* of Noah" we would expect, asks Rashi, that this phrase would be followed by the names of Noah's children, Shem, Cham, and Yafet. But, rather, the Torah states that Noah was a righteous person, and only then, lists his children. Why? Rashi gives a number of explanations. In one of these, he says that children are like the good actions of the righteous. That is all Rashi says, but he does not connect the dots for us. **How** exactly are the good actions of the righteous like children? It is here we see the brilliance of Rashi. Rashi is first telling us that children are indeed our key to immortality. Children who continue the values, actions, and morality of parents, keep the parents alive, even after their have physically died. The ripple of effect of the parents, then, continues for many generations, if children and grandchildren follow in their ways. So, too, the good actions of the righteous continue forever. Their ripple effects touches some people in one generation and continues to keep that Tzadik-righteous person alive by affecting generation after generation.

This impact can be seen in the non-Jewish world as well. Only historians would have heard of Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite, if he had not realized that his inventions will cause people only pain. So, he gave all his money to inspire learning on a high level, and

## Likutei Divrei Torah

as a prize to the top scientists, poets, and peace-loving leaders. Today, people know this prize given in his name, and Alfred Nobel lives on, by continuing to do good in the world. So, too, Cecil Rhodes was a famous politician in his time. He even had a country named after him - Rhodesia. But this man is known today for the scholarship he gave/gives yearly to young scholars who can advance their studies at Oxford University and later help change the world. The country named for him became a symbol of Apartheid and was expunged eventually from the name of countries. But every Rhodes Scholar knows who Cecil Rhodes was, is appreciative of him, and, thus, he remains alive today.

In the very last verse of the Parsha, it says that Terach, Abraham's father, died at the age of 206. There should be no need to comment on this statement, expect that Rashi realized that Terach lived 60 years longer than this placement in the Torah. Why mention it now, when Terach's death should have been mentioned much later in future Torah portions? One of the answers that Rashi brings is that an evil person such as Terach had nothing positive to contribute for the rest of his life, and certainly after this life (Abraham's greatness was all his own doing). Thus, an evil person is considered dead, even in his lifetime since he or she contributes nothing to society. No immortality. Therefore, while a righteous person continues to live forever through his actions and some people attain immortality through their children, an evil person does not even attain "immortality" during life and dies without contributing to society.

**Another Aspect to Achieving Eternity – Comparing Names in Parshat Beraishit**

In the entire Tanach-Jewish Bible, almost every person mentioned is only named once. There was only one Abraham, one Moses, one David, one Solomon, etc. When a person is named for two different people, the Rabbis take notice, such as with the name Deborah, both the nurse of Rivka (**Genesis 35:8**) and the famous prophetess (**Judges 4**). Thus, when there are not one, but two different people in last week's Parsha, Beraishit, with very same names, the Torah is almost begging us to compare and contrast them. Adam and Eve had two sons that survived and had children, Kayin and Shait-Seth. As was mentioned previously, Chanoch was the son of Kayin. All that is known about him that Cain built a city in his name (to achieve immortality and permanence). But the sixth generation of Shait was another Chanoch, born to Yered, (**Genesis 5:18**). All the Torah says about Chanoch is "Chanoch walked with God." The commentaries say he was a holy man, as the Torah uses the same phraseology as it did with Noah who was called righteous. And the son of Chanoch was Methuselah, who was also known as righteous, lived longer than any other human being.



There is another name in Parshat Beraishit shared by two people – Lemech. The Lemech from Kayin was the sixth generation after Kayin (**Genesis 4:18**). The Torah says Lemech took two wives who had three children.

Lemech was a brilliant and skilled man, who taught each of his sons a different skill that would change the world through his genius. Lemech taught Yaval to master animal husbandry. To Yuval, Lemech taught music and how to assemble musical instruments. And to Tubal-Kayin, Lemech taught how to assemble and create weapons of war (**Genesis 4:19-22**). Lemech was certain that with his development of mankind through his children, he would achieve eternity and immortality. Then, in two poetic verses, Lemech admits to killing someone, and says that while the original Kayin will suffer seven times, he will suffer seventy-seven-fold. The other Lemech from Shait was the son of Methuselah (**Genesis 5:25**). To this Lemech was born Noah. Besides Adam and Eve, Lemech is the only person in this Torah Portion recorded as giving a reason for the name of his son – that Noah should provide consolation for his entire generation.

Two Chanochs and two Lemechs, all trying to achieve immortality and eternity. The Chanoch of Kayin by help building and being named for a physical city, and Lemech of Kayin by changing the world through innovation. The Chanoch of Shait clings to God, and the Lemech of Shait, son of a Tzadik and father of a Tzadik, try to help the world be consoled. What eventually happened to these people? Every person from Kayin's entire progeny died, and all their developments in the physical world died with them – through the Flood. No more city of Chanoch. There is no record that the innovations of Lemech survived. But Chanoch and Lemech from Shait, who were spiritual people, lived on, not only through their children (Noah) but also through the spirituality that eventually spread through the world beginning with Noah's son, Shem. Thus, we see that those who cling to spirituality achieve an eternity with God, which also keeps them immortal, in a sense, and continue to live, not only through their children, but by belonging to something that continues to live on, beyond any physical life and beyond any Flood.

\* **This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)**

\*

---

### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

#### The Extraordinary Powers Within Us Rabbi Bezalel Safra

Are you able to bring down rain? Do people have the ability to impact on nature? Surely that is impossible.

However, a moment of reflection will reveal we actually do believe in this notion. We even recite it a few times each day, in the second portion of Kriyat Shema:

“And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied.”

The verse states that if we hearken unto God, He will give us rain and bless us with bountiful produce. In other words – our ethical behavior impacts upon nature.

At the same time, the Torah warns us:

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and turn astray, and serve other gods, and worship them; and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and He shut the heavens, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit; and you perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord has given you.”

In other words, moral corruption will stop the rains and lead to exile.

This is also the message of Parshat Noach; the flood comes in the wake of moral corruption. If we have the power to impact the world, we should also be accountable to it.

“And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah: ‘The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.’”

Moral conduct not only impacts nature, but also impacts world politics. This is the leitmotif running through many of the stories found in the book of Judges, which repeatedly describes how the People of Israel sin, resulting in their defeat in battle and consequent enslavement.

“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of looters that looted them, and He gave them over into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.”

If one were to ask why our enemies defeat us in battle, the politician might give political or tactical reasons. In the natural order of things, this explanation is true. However, there is also a supernatural layer which offers an ethical explanation: God is angry with us because of

## Likutei Divrei Torah

our sins. Similarly, if one were to ask why there is drought, the scientist will offer a scientific explanation relating to the pattern of winds and clouds and precipitation. This is a correct explanation which follows the laws of nature.

But why have the winds aligned themselves thus? The deeper reason must be spiritual: there is no rain because of moral corruption. Both natural and political phenomena are based on natural causality; however, the latter is superseded by a spiritual-moral determinant. If phrased differently: a spiritual cause lies at the core of any natural-scientific phenomenon, and is thus the ultimate reason for any occurrence. And if this is so – then how great is our responsibility!

Psychosomatic medicine claims that the soul impacts the body, so much so – that a person who is mentally stressed could suffer a heart attack. So too when it comes to Man, who is the prime of Creation, the vital spirit of the world – of course his actions impact the physical world.

This is how Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook explains this notion in his book *Orot Yisrael Utchiyato*, Chapter 2:

“There are two general understandings that encompass existence, and Torah, all the varied aspects of perception: the ethical approach and the causal approach. Within the causal approach, which chronologically preceded the human spirit, is subsumed the ethical approach that acts as an oversoul vivifying it.”

We tend to research our world through science, investigating various forms of causality. Rav Kook contends that indeed everything has a cause, and one is even able to understand this causality. However, on a deeper dimension there also exists an ethical understanding, which is the heart and soul of the causal understanding. Much like the soul gives life to the body, ethics is the deeper cause of all that transpires; our morality infuses life into our circumstances. Rav Kook continues:

“In the chain of causality there is contained a general restriction, a constriction that constrains the laws and their content to specific causal pathways, preventing them from attaching to different pathways.”

The laws of nature are set in stone; there is no room for flexibility. Nevertheless, moral behavior and ethical conduct can lead to a freedom which exists beyond Nature's rigid rules.

“However, when we ascend to a higher plane of freedom, we are freed of this causal restriction, and the entire structure of laws appears to us as being held together by ethical bonds that are no weaker and are even stronger than those of the causal explanation, and whose total value is infinitely more exalted. Then we stand in a world of freedom: when the ethical universe is revealed to us, it uplifts the causal universe, attracts it and enlightens it, flooding it in a sea of living light of ethical laws that far surpass the causal laws.”

Hence, behind the scenes of life, what sets off nature, politics and even history is our very own behavior, human conduct. Consequently, we bear an enormous responsibility as human beings to preserve the world and engage in Tikkun Olam, through every deed of ours and every word we utter. This is the great lesson to be learned from the story of the Flood.

---

### World Mizrahi Dear Torah

#### Rav Doron Perez

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

What could be more Jewish than that? Yet, Avraham (Abraham) was the first Jew, not Noach.

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

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

The Sforno says “a tzaddik who only focuses on his own internal perfection, then only he will be saved.” But a tzaddik who is able to focus on the lives of others, take responsibility for others, and feel that their destiny is intertwined with others – they will impact on the lives of others.

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

We need to be involved in our own personal growth, to be the best people we can be – but it

doesn't end with us and our home. It has to be far broader. There has to be a sense of communal responsibility, national responsibility, a responsibility for society and all those around us. That is the Jewish way.

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

---

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Mordechai Willig Longevity

I. Last week, our community lost two of its illustrious elder statesmen. On Thursday, we mourned the loss of Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler, who passed away at age 95. On Friday, we mourned the loss of Rabbi Dr. David Eliach, who passed away at age 99!

While radically different in fields of expertise and personality, these two iconic figures shared a special blessing from Hashem. They were active, intellectually and even professionally, until the very end of their lives.

As we end the Torah cycle and begin anew, this theme resonates in Chumash and classical meforshim, an area in which both of the late nonagenarian scholars excelled. On Simchas Torah we read "U'k'yamecha dav'echa" - "Like the days of your prime, so may your old age be" (Devarim 33:25). Rashi teaches that this bracha was given to all of Klal Yisrael, not just one shevet. "For you, the days of your old age, which typically ooze away and founder, will be good like the days of your youth."

The story of the mabul, the focus of Parshas Noach, in fact begins at the end of Parshas Breishis. Hashem reacted to the immorality of the generation (Rashi 6:2) by saying (6:3), "My spirit will not contend forever concerning man" - about whether to destroy man or not (Rashi). "His days will be 120 years" - after which if they do not repent, I will bring a flood upon them (Rashi).

The blessing of "may you live until 120" cannot be based on this passuk according Rashi. It presumably is based on Moshe's longevity (Devarim 34:7), which showed no signs of old age (Ibn Ezra, Rashbam). Perhaps that is why we do not pray to attain the greater longevity of the patriarchs (175, 180, and 147 years), since they exhibited (in Avraham's case initiated, Bava Metzia 87a) signs of old age, including blindness (Breishis 27:1, 48:10).

However, the Rosh (6:3) reads that passuk as a source for the life of 120 years. "My spirit" refers to the Heavenly soul of man. No longer will the soul be within the body for a very long time, the 900-year antediluvian lifespan. Why? Because they are "basar" - decadent. Their longevity caused their souls to be perverted, to follow their base sensual desires into old age,

## Likutei Divrei Torah

instead of angelic lives of knowledge, for which they were created. Therefore, their lifespan will last only 120 years.

While the decline was gradual and, according to the Ramban (5:4), affected by the flood and the dispersion, the Rosh attributes this shortened lifespan to man's sinful abuse of his longevity. Thus, our prayer "until 120" is, in fact, based on this passuk, and connotes a refined, spiritual life, as well as a healthy one.

II. "Al tashlicheini le'es zikna" - "Do not cast me off in old age" (Tehillim 71:9). This phrase, repeated so often, and at times with great feeling, during the Yamim Noraim, has many interpretations. All of them seem to contend with the obvious question: don't we want to live to an old age?

The simple answer is reflected in the end of the passuk "When my strength fails, do not forsake me." We want good lives in old age, notwithstanding the inevitable physical weakening. Do not leave me to infirmity. This parallels the earlier passuk (51:13), juxtaposed during selichos, "Do not throw me from Your Presence. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." This is the spiritual and mental equivalent which precedes 71:19 both in Tehillim and in our liturgy. In context, it is a prayer for full intellectual and spiritual capacity in old age. Do not punish me with dementia.

The Ba'al Shem Tov (cited by his grandson, Degel Machaneh Efraim, Devarim 7:12) interprets the passuk to mean "Don't throw me into an old age mentality" (le'is zikna). Just as one weakens physically, so, too, spiritually, something old is not enjoyable. If it is not "new," it does not have great life (chiyus). We pray to always feel newly refreshed in serving Hashem.

Rav Yitzel of Peterburg (cited in Yated Ne'eman, Musaf L'shabbos Ki Savo 5755, p. 6) related a story of Czar Nicholai's army. Conditions were so brutal that many would hide to avoid conscription. If caught, they were sent to Siberia for many years. Once, the Czar declared an amnesty, a forgiveness for past draft-dodging. Tens of thousands of Russians, young and old, reported to the draft office. The young were conscripted, and the old were sent to court. They complained to the judge, who responded: The youngsters are forgiven by serving in the army. But you are too old to serve and must stand judgment. We pray, do not throw us away in old age. Allow us to repay You for our shortcomings by serving You with our remaining strength. Do not forsake us.

Notwithstanding the recent COVID decline, the average lifespan has risen dramatically in recent years. Governments are worried about financial implications as the ratio of workers to retirees changes. For us, retirement is dangerous. "A man does not die except from batala" (Avos D'Rebbi Nasan 11:1). Lack of

activity can shorten life, as recent studies have shown. A Torah Jew who retires, willingly or forcibly, must remain active. For graduates of yeshivos, this is best accomplished by extensive Torah study. Many communities have kollelim for retirees, where old, and not so old, men learn with youthful vigor and passion. This contributes significantly to al tashlicheinu, both physically and spiritually. For others, men and women, chessed activity achieves the same goals.

Every Shabbos, evening and morning, we describe a tzaddik who flourishes in Hashem's Presence: "They will still be fruitful in old age, they will be vigorous and fresh" (Tehillim 92:14). May all of us be blessed with longevity, healthy in our minds, spirits and bodies, until 120, ad me'ah ve'esrim shanah.

---

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

---

**Husband and Wife**

Of all the clean animals you shall take for yourself seven pairs, (ish v'Ishto) a male and its mate, and of the animals that are not clean, two, (ish v'Ishto) a male and its mate. (Breishis 7:2)

Here's a puzzling expression and it occurs twice! The animals being taken onto the Ark of Noach, the ones chosen to survive and propagate their species are referred to as "ish v'ishto" – literally "a husband and his wife".

That statement seems to undermine the original use of that term in reference to Adam and Chava. She is called ISHTO because she comes from him, the rib of the ISH. From that naming Rashi tells us that the original language of the world, the one with which HASHEM created the universe, which was Loshon HaKodesh, the Holy Language of Hebrew. Ish and Ishto are a play on words.

It gets even more complicated. It's hard to go through an entire week of Sheva Brochos for a newly married couple without this idea being mentioned. The word for man – "Ish" is made up of three letters, ALEF- YUD- SHIN. The word for woman "Isha" is also comprised of three letters, ALEF- SHIN- HEY. They have two letters in common ALEF and SHIN while they each have one different letter, man has a YUD and woman has a HEY. The letters YUD and HEY spell out the essential name of HASHEM. When the husband and wife are peaceful with each other, then the Divine Presence is with them. When there is discord then the Divine Presence departs and we are left with ALEF and SHIN from both and that is fire and fire. They can consume each other with their selfish fire.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. asked an interesting question. We have two places in the Torah where the requirement is Dveikus – Attachment. Early on in history by the first couple, Adam and Chava the Torah declares, "therefore a person should abandon (his

dependency) on his father and mother and cleave (Daveik) to his wife, and they will become one flesh". Later in Chumash there is another declared mandate that we should "cleave to HASHEM". How is it possible that one can have two 100% commitments, a dual loyalty to one's spouse and HASHEM? He explains that it is not a question at all. Husband and wife are cleaving to HASHEM – the YUD and HEY and in doing so that is the real glue that allows them to remain loyally attached to each other. A beautiful and powerful but how do now make sense of this in light of the fact that the pure and impure animals that entered Noach's Ark were also called ISH v'ISHTO? Problematic?

It was a student of the Baal Shem Tov, I believe that pointed out something fascinating about the dimensions of the Teva, the Ark. One name for the Yetzer Hora is spelled SOMECH – MEM -ALEF -LAMED and another is the name of the snake -NACHASH – NUN -CHES- SHIN. In each of those two words there are positive and negative letters. SOMECH and MEM are negative and that leaves over the name for HASHEM's kindly tendency ALEF – LAMED. In NACHASH the CHES is negative, it is first used to spell darkness and the SHIN and NUN are positive. Negativity cannot survive without some connection to goodness. HASHEM brought the flood to erase CHAMAS... CHES- MEM – SOMECH... the three negative letters and what remained was SHIN (300) – NUN (50) LAMED (30) and ALEF (1), letters that have the value of the dimension of the Teva, the Ark. When good is isolated from the bad then the bad is eliminated. When Noach entered the Teva CHAMAS was destroyed. Noach's world. Only Noach and his wife and his children and their wives were uncorrupted in an extremely perverse world.

When HASHEM made man he declared, "Let us make man in our image!" Who is the "us"?! The answer is that HASHEM called upon the entire physical and spiritual world to plug into and invest their destiny in mankind, a creature of free will. Each person is at the top of the pyramid of his own world, whichever creatures he is connected to. When the animals acted perversely it was because of mankind.

Everything had to be eliminated. Only Noach and family remained pure. The animals that followed them into the Teva represented the best of mankind and so they too were worthy of being deemed ISH V'ISHTO. "The fish rots from the head down" but so is a world built from the top down. So, it can be said of Noach's animals as well, I now pronounce you husband and wife.

**Weekly Parsha NOACH**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The greater a person is or believes he or she is, the smaller the room for error in one's life decisions. Had Noah been merely Mr. Noah, his choice of beginning the world again with a vineyard and wine would have been acceptable and even understandable. After all, the trauma of the destruction of so many human beings in the waters of the great flood required some sort of release of tension and an escape mechanism. But he was not just plain Noah when the Lord commanded him to build his ark and restart humanity.

He was Noah, the righteous man of his generation, the person who represented goodness and service to God and humanity. He was special, an exalted person who overcame the influences of a wicked and dissolute society and withstood its ridicule and insults. A person of such noble character and pious nature should not begin the rebuilding of human society with vineyards and wine.

It sent the wrong message to his progeny and through them to all later generations as well. Holy people are to be held to holy standards of behavior and endeavor. There are no one-size fits all in ethical and moral standards of behavior. The rabbis of Midrash taught us that with a greater human capacity for holiness there is a commensurate capacity for dissolute behavior as well.

The Talmud states that it is the scholarly righteous who have the strongest evil inclination within them. The responsibility for spiritual greatness is commensurate with the capacity for the holy greatness of each individual person. This is why Noah finds himself criticized by Midrash, and later Jewish biblical commentators, in spite of the Torah's glowing compliments paid to him in its initial description.

A person of the stature of Noah should not be found drunk and disheveled in his tent, an inviting figure for the debauchery of his own offspring. The failure of greatness is depressing. As King Solomon put it: "If the flame has consumed the great cedars, then what else can be the fate of the hyssop of the wall?"

Greatness carries with it enormous burdens and fateful consequences. As we pride ourselves on being the "chosen people" we are held by Heaven to behave and live our lives as being a chosen people. Wine and drunkenness will not suffice for a nation that is destined to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a special people.

Burdened by this greatness the Jewish people have fallen short of the mark numerous times in our history. But we have always risen again to attempt to fulfill our destiny and realize our potential. It is this characteristic of resilience, inherited from our father Abraham, that has been the key to our survival. We have constantly dealt with great ideas and issues. Drunkenness, whether physical or spiritual, has never been a trait of Jewish society. We are aware of the story and fate of Noah, but we pursue the greatness of Abraham as our goal in life.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

---

**NOACH :: The Courage to Live with Uncertainty**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

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

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

The occasion was not special. He was merely giving us one of his regular divrei Torah. The week was parshat Noah. But the Midrash he quoted to us was extraordinary. In fact, it is quite hard to find. It appears

in the book known as Buber's Tanchuma, published in 1885 by Martin Buber's grandfather Shlomo from ancient manuscripts. It is a very early text – some say as early as the fifth century – and it has some overlap with an ancient Midrash of which we no longer have the full text known as Midrash Yelamdenu.

The text is in two parts, and it is a commentary on God's words to Noah: "Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the Ark" (Gen. 8:16). On this the Midrash says:

Noah said to himself, "Since I only entered the Ark with permission (from God), shall I leave without permission?" The Holy One blessed be He said, to him: "Are you looking for permission? In that case I give you permission." Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the Ark."

The Midrash then adds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

## Parshas Noach

### Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Shmuel Yakov ben Tzvi Hirsh.

#### Clothes Call

He (Noach) drank from the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers [...] Shem and Yefes took a garment and placed it upon both of their shoulders, and they walked backward and covered their father’s nakedness [...] (9:22-23).

Rashi (9:22) explains the circumstances of these events: Noach’s son Cham (upon seeing his father naked and passed out drunk) emasculated his father and joyfully reported his actions to his brothers. Rashi (9:25) further explains that Cham was driven by the desire to eliminate competition for their inheritance: As long as there were three brothers, the world would be divided only among them, but if Noach were to have additional children, they would have to share it with more heirs. In Cham’s view, he had done the family a service by mutilating his father.

Upon hearing this, Shem and Yefes quickly went to their father and very respectfully covered him up. Both Shem and Yefes were rewarded for their action. Yet there is an enormous disparity in the way Noach’s two sons were rewarded.

Shem’s reward was that his descendants received the mitzvah of *tzitzis* – a precept that would be observed by every Jewish male, in every generation, on every day of his life. However, for Yefes the reward was confined to a one-time event later in history: his descendants would be given a proper burial, rather than their dead bodies being left strewn across a battlefield.

Rashi explains that this disparity is because Shem’s merit was greater since he acted with greater alacrity than Yefes in the performance of this mitzvah. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that a modicum of extra

effort – a mere technical difference between the actions of the two – led to such a colossal difference between the two brothers’ rewards.

To properly understand why each one received the reward that he did, one must examine the mindsets and motivations behind their actions. As it turns out, Shem and Yefes had very different reasons for wanting to cover their father.

Shem, who would later lead the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever (where Yaakov Avinu studied for fourteen years) had an innate sensitivity that the human body needs to be covered for its own dignity. After hearing that his father was exposed in his tent, Shem quickly went to remedy the situation. On the other hand, Yefes, who is identified as the father of the Greeks, was the precursor of the well-known Greek philosophy extolling the virtues and beauty of the naked human form. In fact, the name Yefes come from the Hebrew word “*yafeh* – beautiful.” In his mind, the body doesn’t need to be covered; however, once he heard that Cham had mutilated the body, he felt compelled to cover it because it was no longer an object of beauty.

Shem, whose instinct was to add dignity to human body by covering it, was rewarded with a dignified article of clothing proclaiming that the wearer is in the service of God – a high honor indeed. Yefes’ reward was that the mutilated bodies of his decedents on the battlefield would merit burial – because that was his instinct; to cover a mutilated body.

Peace or Piece?

At the end of the parsha (11:1), the Torah relates the story of Migdal Bavel. Essentially, the different nations of the world became united with a single language and purpose; to build a tower to enter the heavens in order to launch an attack on Hashem. After descending to examine the situation, Hashem decided (11:9) to confuse their languages and scatter them across the face of the earth. This becomes known as “the dispersion.”

Rashi (*ad loc*) contrasts the sins of the generation of the flood with that of the generation of the dispersion: The generation of the flood deserved extermination because there was stealing and hostility between them. Even though the generation of the tower committed a seemingly much more heinous sin (by choosing to wage a war on Hashem) their punishment (being scattered) was a lot less severe. As Rashi explains, this is because there was unity and peace between them. In other words, they had united for a common cause (waging a war on Hashem). Rashi concludes, “one can learn from here that conflict is hateful and peace is paramount.”

However, if the sole reason for sparing the generation of the dispersion was because of the unity amongst them, then why remove their one redeeming quality by “mixing their languages and scattering them across the face of the earth?” In fact, by dispersing them and forcing them to try to communicate in different languages, their coalition would inevitably dissolve, and it seems almost guaranteed that they would eventually come to the strife and discord of the generation of the flood! Wouldn’t this eventually lead to their destruction as well?

In order to comprehend this, we must reexamine our understanding of what *shalom* truly means. We often talk about “*shalom bayis*” or “making *shalom*” between people who are feuding. Most people believe that merely getting others to coexist peacefully is the key to creating *shalom*; but this is, at best, an incomplete approach to *shalom*. In this parsha, the Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about how to create a lasting *shalom*.

The key component to creating *shalom* is having an individual recognize what is unique about himself, and what he alone contributes. In other words, when a person feels good about himself and secure in the knowledge that he has something special to contribute, then he won’t feel threatened by other people and/or their accomplishments. In fact, once he is secure, he can begin to appreciate what another person might add to a given situation.

This is precisely what Hashem did for the generation of the dispersion. Originally, their unity in purpose was a unifying factor, but ultimately it would have likely dissolved into interpersonal conflict once the original purpose was either achieved or otherwise became irrelevant. Hashem

actually gave them a lasting chance at shalom by giving each component of the generation their own space and language.

These two aspects are the keys to giving a nation its own definition; a particular type of geography develops a certain defined skill set, and different languages to express the individual uniqueness of those nationalities. Once each nation is satisfied and comfortable with its identity, it becomes possible to appreciate other nations and nationalities. Thus, the nations can begin to see how they need each other. When there is a level of personal satisfaction among the people of a nation, the other nations are no longer viewed as a threat; in fact, they are recognized as necessary allies in order to achieve goals for the greater good. This is the very definition of shalom; completing each other to create a greater whole. This is true in our world, in our community, and in our homes.

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 be interesting to contrast the teivah with one of the most famous ships in modern history: the RMS Titanic.

Teivah	vs	RMS Titanic
1) Time to Build		120 years
2) Construction Crew		4
3) Length		600 feet
4) Width		100 feet
5) Height		60 feet
6) Draught		22 feet
7) Decks		3
8) Weight		35,741 tons
9) Length of Service		378 days

---

[chiefrabbi.org](http://chiefrabbi.org)

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah Noach: What is our most repetitive blessing?**

**26 October 2022**

What is our most repetitive blessing?

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

The wording is as follows:

*Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu melech haolam – Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe*

*zocher habit – who remembers the Covenant*

*vene'eman bevrito – and Who is faithful to His Covenant*

*vekayam bema'amaro – and who fulfils His word.*

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

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

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

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

When you come to think of it, they are not completely repetitive. First of all we say, "zocher habit," – "Hashem remembers the Covenant." Remembering could mean recalling without necessarily doing anything about it, and that's why in addition we say, "vene'eman bevrito," – "He is faithful to His covenant," that is, He cares about it, He will recall it properly for the sake of the future, but even that isn't sufficient. We

need the third statement, "vekayam bema'amaro" – "and who fulfils His word." Hashem will act on His word to guarantee in practice that He will deliver.

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

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

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

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

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

---

### **Drasha Parshas Noach :: Language Barrier**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

The lessons of the flood were just washed away. 340 years later the humans were up to their rebellious antics. This time, however, they were unified in rebellion. They decided that they would battle the Almighty by building a Tower that would ascend to the heavens. But their plans would topple like a house of cards. Hashem turned to his celestial hosts and declared, "Let Us descend and confuse their language that they should not understand one another's language" (Beraishis 11:7).

Havoc reigned. When one construction worker asked for a brick he was handed a hammer. Someone asked for a ladder and they got a trowel. The only thing being built was discord and mistrust. Within days the project fell apart and the people and their languages were dispersed.

Why, however, did Hashem choose to destroy this project through a most delicate manner. Why not have a wind topple the tower or an earthquake shatter it. What message did Hashem send by confusing the languages? Jacob M. Braude, a former Illinois judge, tells the story of an American visiting the UK who was driving with an Englishman through London. During their trip some mud splattered on the car and the Englishman commented that the car's windscreen needed a cleaning.

"Windshield," retorted the American.

"Well, on this side of the pond we call it a windscreen."

"Then you're wrong," argued the American. "After all, we Americans invented the automobile, and we call it a windshield."

"That is mighty dandy," snapped the Englishman. "But who invented the language?"

My brother-in-law Rabbi Yitzchak Knobel, founder of Yeshiva Gedolah Ateres Yaakov in Woodmere, once noted something amazing. Though Hashem acts independently and needs not consult with any being before executing any decision, the Torah on a few occasions has Him descending to observe, and even consult with his celestial tribunal before taking action.

Last week, before creating man, the Torah quotes Hashem speaking, "Let Us make man." This week, when deciding to confuse the language of humankind, thus inhibiting the ability to communicate, Hashem also consults with inferiors. "Let Us descend and confuse." Hashem does not say, "I will descend and confuse." Both instances must be related.

The power of man over his co-creations is his ability to express his innermost feelings and expressions. The creation of man was more than the creation a physical entity with complex motor functions. It was the creation of a being with the power of expression the power to communicate. When Hashem decided to remove the ability to communicate, He returned to his original tribunal the ones He originally consulted while empowering speech in humankind.

The greatest downfall of humankind is the removal of his superiority over the rest of the animal kingdom. That is accomplished when he does not communicate.

[In 1999], a billion dollar project to Mars was destroyed because the language of the metric system was spoken in one factory and feet and inches were spoken in the other.

Hashem taught those builders who wanted to reach G-d that their mortality did not lie in lime or mortar. Rather it lay in the small intangible gift that we all take for granted, yet is so fragile and not utilized properly. Our mortality begins and ends with our power to talk properly and for the correct reasons to our fellow human beings.

*Good Shabbos*

*Dedicated in memory of Reb Shimon Sumner by the Oliner Family*

*Copyright © 1998 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.*

*Copyright © 1998 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.*

*Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.*

*Drasha © 2022 by Torah.org.*

---

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand -**

**Parshas Noach**

**The Connection Between Noach and Metzorah**

The pasuk in Parshas Noach says: “Make for yourself a Teiva (Ark) of Gofar wood, with Kinim (compartments)...” (Bereshis 6:14). The Medrash in Bereshis Rabbah (Chapter 31) connects the word Kinim in this pasuk with the term Kinim (pair of birds) used in the purification ritual of a Metzorah. The Medrash states: “Just like this Kain (bird pair) purifies the Metzorah, so too your Teiva will purify you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sometimes Only Hashem Realizes...

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

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

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

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD [dhoffman@torah.org](mailto:dhoffman@torah.org)*

*Rav Frand © 2020 by Torah.org.*

---

**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

**Parashat Noah – 5783 :: Who Can Be the Patriarch of the Nation?**

This week’s Torah portion is named for the person at the center of the story of the flood described in the parasha: Noah. Who is this man who lived in such corrupt times that G-d had no choice but to flood the world with water and save only one man with his family – those from whom a new humanity would be formed after the flood? This is how he’s described in the first verse of the parasha:

*Noah was a righteous man he was perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God. (Noah 6, 9)*

Seemingly, this is an especially positive description: a righteous man, perfect...he worshipped G-d. But one phrase here caught the attention of the Sages – “in his generation.” Simply put, it seems that Noah was a righteous man relative to others who lived in his generation. But why was it important to mention this? Isn’t it obvious when referring to a generation as corrupt as the generation of the flood? This is what Rashi says:

In his generations: Some of our Sages interpret it favorably: How much more so if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation, he was righteous, but if he had been in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.

This midrash is surprising. What motivation would there be to use a derogatory phrase to describe Noah after the Torah had just praised him

as righteous? It seems that the answer to this lies in the personality to which Noah is compared – Abraham. Abraham was chosen to be the patriarch of the Jewish nation. Why wasn't Noah – the righteous and perfect – chosen for this purpose?

The Zohar describes a dialogue between Noah and G-d after the flood when Noah left the ark he had been in while the world around him drowned.

*What did God answer Noah when he left the Ark and saw the world destroyed? He [Noah] began to cry before God and he said, "Master of the universe, You are called compassionate. You should have been compassionate for Your creation." God responded and said, "You are a foolish shepherd. Now you say this?! Why did you not say this at the time I told you that I saw that you were righteous among your generation, or afterward when I said that I will bring a flood upon the people, or afterward when I said to build an ark? I constantly delayed and I said, 'When is he [Noah] going to ask for compassion for the world?' ... And now that the world is destroyed, you open your mouth, to cry in front of me, and to ask for supplication?" (Zohar, Noah)*

This ancient source criticizes Noah for worrying about himself and not trying to prevent the flood. Based on this, we can understand the comparison with Abraham. Abraham also had an event in his life that can be compared with the flood. The people of Sodom sinned miserably against one another and G-d decided to destroy the city. Like He did with Noah and the flood, G-d here too revealed His plan in advance, this time to Abraham. But Abraham's response was very different from Noah's. He prayed to G-d and begged for the people of Sodom to be saved.

There is a phrase in Yiddish – "ah tzaddik in peltz," meaning a righteous person in a fur coat – that describes several people sitting in a room in bone-chilling cold. How do they cope with the cold? One person stands up and turns on the heater so that he gets warmer and so do the other people in the room. But another person stands up and doesn't turn on the heater, but rather he puts on a fur coat. He gets warmer but everyone else continues to freeze.

Noah was not chosen to be the patriarch of the Jewish nation despite being a righteous person because he did not concern himself with saving the sinners of his generation.

Even before the story of Sodom, we find Abraham spreading faith in one God to the people of his generation. But we do not read about Noah doing anything of the sort. Noah truly was a righteous man, but he did not try to share his faith and save the corrupt and sinning people of his generation.

The person at the foundation of Judaism had to be one who is focused on the principle that he does not live in this world alone. He is also responsible for others to live correctly. Only such a person could be the patriarch of the nation.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

---

### **Rav Kook Torah**

#### **Noah: The Rainbow in the Clouds**

**Rabbi Chanan Morrison**

After the Flood, God informed Noah:

*"I will make My covenant with you, and all flesh will never again be cut off by the waters of a flood.*

*"This is the sign of the covenant that I am placing between Me, you, and every living creature that is with you, for all generations: I have set My rainbow in the clouds... The rainbow will be in the clouds, and I will see it to recall the eternal covenant." (Gen. 9:11-16)*

In what way does the rainbow symbolize God's covenant, never again to destroy the world by a flood? Why does the Torah emphasize that this rainbow is "in the clouds"? And most importantly, what is the significance of this Divine promise never again to flood the world? Does this imply that the Flood was unjust? Or did God change His expectations for the world?

The rainbow is not just a natural phenomenon caused by the refraction of light. The "rainbow in the clouds" represents a paradigm shift in humanity's spiritual development.

### **Pre-Flood Morality**

Before the devastation of the Flood, the world was different than the world we know; it was younger and more vibrant. Its physical aspects were much stronger, and people lived longer lives. Just as the body was more robust, the intellect was also very powerful. People were expected to utilize their intellectual powers as a guide for living in a sensible, moral fashion. The truth alone should have been a sufficient guide for a strong-willed individual. Ideally, awareness of God's presence should be enough to enlighten and direct one's actions. This was the potential of the pristine world of the Garden of Eden.

Rampant violence and immorality in Noah's generation, however, demonstrated that humanity fell abysmally short of its moral and spiritual potential. After the Flood, God fundamentally changed the nature of ethical guidance for the human soul. The sign that God showed Noah, the "rainbow in the clouds," is a metaphor for this change.

### **Greater Moral Guidance**

The rainbow represents divine enlightenment, a refraction of God's light, as it penetrates into our physical world. Why does the Torah emphasize that the rainbow is "in the clouds"? Clouds represent our emotional and physical aspects, just as clouds are heavy and dark (the Hebrew word *geshem* means both 'rain' and 'physical matter'). The covenant of the "rainbow in the clouds" indicates that the Divine enlightenment (the rainbow) now extended from the realm of the intellect, where it existed before the Flood, to the emotional and physical spheres (the clouds).

God's rainbow of light now also penetrated the thick clouds of the material world.

How was this accomplished? The Divine light became 'clothed' in a more physical form – concrete mitzvot. God gave to Noah the first and most basic moral code: the seven laws of the Noahide code. These commandments served to bridge the divide between intellect and deed, between the metaphysical and the physical.

We can now understand God's promise never again to flood the world. After the Flood, total destruction of mankind became unnecessary, as the very nature of human ethical conduct was altered. Our inner spiritual life became more tightly connected to our external physical actions. As a result, the need for such a vast destruction of life, as occurred in the Flood, would not be repeated. Of course, individuals — and even nations — may still choose to sink to the level of savages and barbarians. But the degree of immorality will never again reach the scope of Noah's generation, where only a single family deserved to be saved.

*(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 34-36. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 318-319)*

*Copyright © 2022 Rav Kook Torah*

---

### **Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Parashas Ki Seitzei**

**פרשת נח תשפ"ג**

**אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו**

**These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation. (6:9)**

A well-known debate exists among the sages concerning the term "generations" as it relates to Noach: Was he righteous only in the context of his generation, which was evil? Or, alternatively, even in his evil generation surrounded by moral corruption, he was able to remain righteous. Certainly, in the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, he would have been righteous. In other words, how would Noach have fared in Avraham's generation, which was on a much higher plateau? The question is obvious: What provoked the sages, who viewed Noach in a less-than-favorable manner, to state: "Had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would have been insignificant." Why is it necessary to add what seems to be a harsh statement: "He would have been insignificant?" Perhaps Noach might not have received the *tzaddik* accolades, but he certainly would have been on a higher plane than most of the people in Avraham's generation.

The *Apta Rav*, *זל (Ohaiv Yisrael)* (who usually takes a positive, complimentary approach), explains that actually there is no debate, since



both perspectives concerning Noah are true. The one who opines that had Noah lived during Avraham's generation, he would surely have been a *tzaddik*, has a self-evident position. The fact that he was able to maintain his spiritual status quo, despite being surrounded by individuals for whom moral depravity was a way of life, is an obvious testament to Noah's righteousness. The second opinion which holds that had he lived in Avraham's time he would be insignificant, is a commentary concerning Noah's self-view. His only goal was to serve. Nothing else mattered. He took a dim view of his spiritual achievements, because his only concern was spiritual continuity. He would muse to himself, "So what if I am able to maintain my spiritual integrity? I am surrounded with *reshaim*, evil, depraved people. Thus, in comparison to them, I am considered a *tzaddik*. What if I had lived in a generation of *tzaddikim* – would I be so lauded? No! In a generation of righteous people, I would be insignificant!" The Torah attests to Noah's self-chastisement. *B'dorasav*, in his generation. Noah felt that his excellent reputation was relative only to his generation.

Noah is held accountable for not doing more to reach out to the members of his generation. The *Chasam Sofer* posits that Noah spent a year cooped up in the Ark with all of his "passengers," whom he was relegated to serve day and night. This was his atonement for not exerting himself more to save the people of his generation. As he had been unsuccessful in his outreach efforts, he should have at least prayed for them. Apparently, he did not do enough. Noah's behavior vis-à-vis his community is contrasted to that of Avraham, who not only reached out, but he even prayed to save the sinners who had crossed the line. Apparently, the distinction between Noah and Avraham went beyond the backdrop of their generations. Noah's approach toward outreach was to insulate himself. Avraham was all over, calling out in the Name of Hashem, teaching a pagan world about monotheism. Wherein lay their point of divergence?

*Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*, quotes the *pasuk* that precedes the creation of man: *Naase adam b'tzalmeinu kidmuseinu*, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness (*Bereishis* 1:26). The question which the commentators pose is obvious: Hashem alone created man. As such, it should have stated, *E'eseh adam*, "I will make man." The *Yismach Moshe, zl*, quotes the *Baal HaTurim* who wonders why, concerning the creation of man, the Torah does not write *va'yaar Elokim ki tov*, Hashem saw that it was good," as it writes concerning every other creation. Surely, his creation was good. He explains that all other creations achieve *sheleimus*, completion/perfection as soon as Hashem places them in this world. Thus, the Torah can write that their creation was good. Man, however, is a *baal bechirah*, has the ability to perfect himself. Indeed, he must work hard and long to achieve this. If he ignores his G-d-given mission, instead spending his days seeking all forms of physical gratification, he will not be worthy of Hashem granting him His *Ki Tov* stamp of approval.

Based on the exegesis of the *Baal Haturim's* exegesis, the *Yismach Moshe* explains the meaning of *Naase Adam*, in the plural. *Adam* is used to describe man's elevated status over animals. If the Torah would have written *eeseh adam*, it would imply that man was created to perfection, when, in fact, Hashem created man in such a manner that he would strive to perfect himself. Thus, *Naase Adam* means, "Let us together, Hashem and man, create the perfection of man." The Almighty wants us to partner with Him in creating "ourselves."

We have, however, another explanation for the term *Naase Adam*. It is incumbent upon every one of us to create an *adam*, to teach and reach out to others, so that we recreate them as observant committed Jews. Indeed, *Chazal (Sanhedrin 69b)* teach, "He who teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he made him." Hashem wants each of us to make a man, to create a spiritual metamorphosis in those who are distant, and to strengthen those who are near.

Veritably, both explanations are dependent upon one another. One cannot achieve his personal perfection; he cannot become an *adam* until he perfects his fellow. Noah worked on himself. Avraham reached out to others. This was his approach to perfecting himself. As long as the

rest of the world did not acknowledge Hashem's sovereignty, Avraham viewed himself as less-than-perfect. A Jew does not live for himself. We are here to serve. What greater service can we perform than reaching out to others?

**וְאַתָּה קָח לְךָ מִכָּל מַאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֹאכַל וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ**

**And as for you, take yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it into yourself. (6:21)**

If the animals walked into the Ark on their own without having to be herded in, why could their food not, likewise, arrive on its own? Why did Noah have to go out and gather food for all the animals – enough to last them a year? The *Brisker Rav, zl*, explains that Noah required a special command to gather food, for, otherwise, he may very well have thought that just as the animals came of their own volition, their food should have "arrived" in the same manner. Thus, Hashem informed Noah that the animals would come on their own; their food, however, was his responsibility. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, derives from here that it is incumbent upon a person to think constantly about how to address all the needs of his fellow. He cannot say, "Well, I can only do so much." There is no such concept (it is not acceptable) as "only so much." One must give all of himself to his fellow. This is what *chesed* means – all partial commitment is limited commitment.

*Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, adds that, since the seal of doom against the generation of the Flood was based upon *gezel/chamas*, theft, which represents sins committed in interpersonal relationships, it was necessary that the atonement must be acts of lovingkindness. Noah was spared and charged with establishing a new world, a world in which respect and caring for one another is paramount. It would only be in the merit of a world committed to a life of *chesed* that a devastation the likes of the *Mabul* would never again occur.

With this idea in mind, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains why it was necessary to remain within the confines of the Ark until Hashem instructed him to leave. One would think that Noah was in the Ark in order to be protected from the menacing flood waters. The flood was over; the waters had subsided; why not open the doors and walk down the ramp to freedom?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that while the water had subsided, the survivors merit to leave and re-inhabit the world had not yet been fully achieved. Noah was saved because he had spent one whole year 24/7 taking care of the various creatures on board his Ark. The emotional stress and physical toil that were part and parcel of this mission are indescribable. One time he came late with the lion's dinner and he paid dearly, when the angry lion hit him with great force. Why? The lion does nothing on his own. He is nothing more than Hashem's agent. Apparently, Hashem wanted Noah to feel pain. Why? What did Noah, the consummate *baal chesed*, do that should incur such punishment?

Hashem is demanding of His *tzaddikim*. If Noah tarried even for a moment, if the lion's dinner was delayed for an insignificant period of time, it was cause for punishment! The slightest impropriety in executing *chesed* impaired their ability to leave. The lion's suffering, regardless of his cognitive level, was sufficient cause to delay their departure from the Ark. The new world must be founded on *chesed* that is perfect. If it is in any way compromised, they were not to leave the Ark. Thus, Noah's pain was necessary.

How often do we plan to provide *chesed* for someone, only to come up short? We assuage our conscience, pat ourselves on the back, and muse, "Well, it is more than he/she would have had otherwise." That is not the way it works. Blemished *chesed* is just that! Blemished. Our intentions may be noble, our goal may be realistic, but if something is failing in the execution, it is still blemished. Noble intentions do not help a person in need.

When carrying out acts of *chesed*, we must take the beneficiary under consideration. To make him bend over backwards in order to receive our *chesed* might be worse than no *chesed* at all. It conveys a message: "I will help you when it is convenient for me, and only if it is something I do not mind doing." To help a person, while denying his/her dignity, is not *chesed*.

Indeed, when the benefactor makes the effort to preserve the beneficiary's dignity, the *chesed* quotient rises exponentially. The following story underscores this notion:

A single mother of three young children was shopping at a kosher supermarket located in the tri-state area. Recently divorced, after her husband had walked out on her taking their bank account and savings with him, she was relegated to living off the government programs which provide support for the needy. After ten years of marriage, her suspicions were realized when she discovered that her husband was an addict of sorts. To support his habit he needed money, which he took from his wife. When the issue of a *get* came up, he immediately acquiesced, wanting to get as far from the marriage as possible.

That day, the woman filled up her cart with necessities, the basic foods that she would turn into nourishing meals for her three children. According to her calculations, she still had a few hundred dollars remaining on her food stamp card. Thus, she was shocked when the reader informed her that her food stamp balance was zero. How was she going to pay the one hundred thirty dollars for her groceries? Just then a kind-looking, well-dressed woman appeared. With a big smile, she said, "Here, let me lend you the money. You can pay me back whenever." The woman handed the cashier her credit card to scan and disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

As the act of kindness began to sink in, the woman reminisced about her life the last few years. Her husband had been considered a "good catch" until he fell in with other men of similar background who had fallen prey to the acceptable lifestyle of the secular society outside of the *frum/yeshivah* world. One thing led to another. At first, she had no idea that money was missing, that their checkbook balance was always coming up short. It was only after his ugly lifestyle became evident that everything began to fit in.

Her life was a shambles, with no one to whom to turn. Her parents had been killed in an accident when she was but a child. She grew up as an orphan, raised by an aunt and uncle who were loving – but very controlling. The discipline was rigid and strict. Introduced to her husband shortly after seminary, it seemed like a relationship that would blossom and bear fruit. At first it did, until her husband became addicted. What followed was a series of ugly disagreements and constant discord.

Life now became two-faced: the congenial, happy confident face she presented to her children and community; as opposed to her private, inner face – filled with turmoil and doubt, doubt in her faith and doubt in herself. It all changed that afternoon when that kind woman reached out and announced that she was a person worth caring about. She now felt ready to move forward, to break the shackles of insecurity and self-doubt that had until now encumbered her. That woman did much more than give *tzedakah*; she saved a life, and, by extension, a family.

ויאמר אלקים אל נח זאת אות הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין כל בשר על הארץ  
And Hashem said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have confirmed between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth." (9:17)

*Sforno* comments that the bow is a sign for the righteous Jews to commence praying for the generation. The mere fact that the bow appears is a Heavenly message that something is amiss. The people have subverted their spiritual dimension, with punishment being the Heavenly response – unless the righteous pray for Heavenly compassion. The rainbow is the sign of the covenant which Hashem made with mankind: "It is incumbent upon you (Noah), and those like you, to bestir yourselves when you see it, to rouse the people to repent and understand that they must better themselves." (*Sforno*)

The rainbow is a Divine message, a wake-up call to get our spiritual demeanor in shape. The *Talmud* (*Kesubos* 77b) relates an exchange between Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. Rabbi Shimon asked Rabbi Yehoshua whether the rainbow had appeared in his generation. When he replied affirmatively, Rabbi Shimon questioned his righteousness, for a truly great *tzaddik* protects

his generation, so that the message of the rainbow would not be necessary.

Hashem sends messages all the time but, unless people are listening, the messages fall on deaf ears. It is up to those who are not spiritually hearing-impaired to heed Hashem's wake-up calls and pray for themselves and for those who are unable to hear.

The *Alter*, *zl*, *m'Kelm*, writes concerning *Horav Moshe Chaim Lutzatov*, *zl*, the *Ramchal*, author of the seminal *mussar sefer*, *Mesillas Yesharim*, that he listened to the words of the *Navi*, *Simu levavchem al darkeichem*, "Consider how you are faring" (*Chaggai* 1:5). The *Navi* was exhorting the nation to wake up and return to Hashem. The *Ramchal* "listened" and did something about it. Does anyone have an idea how many lives have been impacted by the *Ramchal*? How often are we roused to perform a *mitzvah*, to undertake an important endeavor on behalf of the greater community – only to ignore the "voice"?

*Horav Shimon Schwab*, *zl*, was wont to relate a conversation he merited to have with the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*. It was 1930, and he stopped in *Radin* on his way home from *yeshivah*. The *Chafetz Chaim* asked him, "Are you a *Kohen*?" The *Rav* replied, "No." "Perhaps you are a *Levi*?" "Also no."

"What a pity," the *Chafetz Chaim* said. "*Moshiach Tziddkeinu* is coming, and we will rebuild the *Bais Hamikdash*. We will experience a tremendous yearning to enter the *Bais Hamikdash* [the sanctity of the edifice that was the center of *kedushah* for the Jewish people, will finally have been returned to us]. It will be an irresistible attraction, but only a select few will be permitted to enter. Only *Kohanim* and *Leviim* will gain entry."

The *Chafetz Chaim* continued, "Do you know that I am a *Kohen*? Tell me why are you not a *Kohen*."

The response was obvious, "My father was not a *Kohen*."

"Why is your father not a *Kohen*?" *Rav Schwab* decided not to answer. (He understood the venerable sage had a unique message he sought to convey to him.)

"I will tell you why I am a *Kohen*, and you are not. Three thousand years ago, during the Golden Calf incident, *Moshe Rabbeinu* called out, *Mi l'Hashem eilai*, 'Whoever is with Hashem come to me!' My father and all the other *Kohanim* before him (Members of *Shevet Levi*) came running, joining with *Moshe*. Your ancestors, sadly, did not come forward. Thus, we are the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* (who will serve in the future *Bais Hamikdash*), and you are not."

The clarion call went out then as it does today. Hashem chooses various media to issue His call. Some listen. Some just do not hear. Some hear, but are unable to process its meaning. Others hear, but process the wrong message. The following vignette is a classic example of two responses to a message.

The story is well-known. The reaction is not. During the days of darkness, when the Nazi murderers were systematically decimating European Jewry, ten martyrs, *yeshivah* students, whose only offense was being Jewish, were randomly selected to be hung. This public display of cruelty was by design, in order to disgrace and demoralize the hapless Jews in the ghetto. To add to the pain, the murderers chose the holy day of *Shavuos*, the day of *Kabbolas haTorah*, as the execution date.

Among the ten *bachurim* was a *Gerrer Chassid*, a young man by the name of *Shlomo Zelichovsky*, whose adherence to *kedushah*, sanctity, was extraordinary. His *tefillos* were offered up amid passion, fervor and with utter devotion and self-sacrifice. He told his comrades that they would not permit the evil Nazis to destroy that moment of *mesiras nefesh*. They would transform *Shavuos* into *Yom Kippur*, so that they would ascend to the Heavenly spheres in a state of total purity. That night, *Reb Shlomo* led his group in *Kol Nidrei*, the prayer reserved for *Yom Kippur*. Their voices rang out for the members of the ghetto to hear. They joined in reciting *Tehillim* and *tefillos* pertaining to atonement.

The next morning *Shlomo* led the group in *Tefillas Shacharis*, *Mussaf* and, as the day waned, they prepared for *Tefillas Neilah*, the closing prayer of the Day of Atonement. By now, all members of the ghetto had been rounded up, so that they could watch the public

execution. Terror gripped everyone – everyone, but the ten martyrs, who were ensconced in an otherworldly holiness and purity. The murderers could take their bodies, but not their souls. The Nazis were shocked to see the ten would-be victims come forward, heads held high, as if unafraid of their fate.

Shlomo recited *Tehillim* publicly and loudly. The words, *Ezkerah Elokim v'ehemayah*, from the *Neilah Selichos*, in which we declare our unequivocal devotion to Hashem despite whatever troubles we experience, rang loud and clear. The enemy stood there dumbfounded. They did not understand. How could they? They were sub-humans cloaked in human garb. They were at a loss to make jest of the Jews' death, when they were displaying such a display of courage and bravery.

The nooses were placed around their necks as the words, *Hashem Hu Elokim*; "Hashem is G-d!" were cried out. At the very last moment, Shlomo looked at the assemblage, brothers and sisters, who themselves were uncertain when their turn would come, and cried, "Yidden! Avenge our blood!"

Standing in the crowd was a young man who until that day was on the verge of turning his back on Jewish observance. He had stopped putting on *Tefillin*, and *Shabbos* had become a memory. A tormented soul, he could not bring himself to continue his religious commitment. Too much tragedy had occurred. He was overwhelmed with grief. Today, standing there, hearing the words, "Yidden! Avenge our blood," he realized that the only way to avenge their blood was to continue what they believed. For the first time in weeks, he put on *Tefillin* and *davened* fervently to Hashem. He had returned.

Some erect memorials, while some dedicate their lives to serving as living memorials.

#### ***Va'ani Tefillah***

**אשרי ובה לציון – Ashrei U'va l'tzion. Praiseworthy (and) a Redeemer shall come to Tzion.**

Following *Tachanun* (and *Krias HaTorah* on Monday and Thursday), we recite the *tefillah* (actually) comprised of three *tefillas*: *Ashrei*, *Lamnatzeach/yaancha Hashem b'Yom tzarah* (*Tehillim* 20), followed by *U'va l'tzion*, known in the *Gemorah* as *Kedushah d'sidra*, a term which refers to the most important part of the prayer; *Kiddusha d'Sidra*, the Order of *Kedushah*, is a recitation of the Heavenly Angel's praises of Hashem. The *Levush* (*Orach Chaim* 132:1) writes that *Ashrei* should be recited thrice daily, consistent with *Chazal's* (*Berachos* 4b) statement, "Whoever recites *Tehillah l'David* (*Ashrei*) three times daily is assured a place in *Olam Habba*. The first time we recite it is during *Pesukei d'Zimra*; the second time is following *Tefillas Shemoneh Esrai*; the third time is during *Tefillas Minchah*. Noticeably, all three times occur during the day, because *tehillah*, praises (*Tehillim*), are not offered at night.

The *Arizal* taught that *mikra*, *Torah She'b'ksav*, should not be read at night. Learning *Chumash* with *Targum*, translation, or with *Rashi* is permissible at night. *Tehillim*, according to many opinions, is included in the *Arizal's* enjoinder against *mikra* at night. Certainly, *Tehillim* recitation for someone who is ill is permissible. After *chatzos*, during the second half of the night, *Tehillim* recitation is permissible. The stated reason for this stringency is that night is a time of *Din*, Strict Justice; the *Torah She'B'ksav*, due to its general vagueness and need for *Talmudic* elucidation, is related to *Din*. One should not awaken *dinim* by reading *pesukim* at night.

*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' חשוון תשע"ד - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

*Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved*  
*prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

#### **[Noach**

#### **The Hero for the Simple People**

Thank Goodness, Noach Was No Saint

#### **Rabbi YY Jacobson**

October 31, 2019 [2 Cheshvan 5780

Henry Kissinger's Suit

There is an old Jewish anecdote about former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who decides to make for himself a custom-made beautiful three-piece suit of the finest material. During his next trip to Italy, he has himself measured by a world-renown designer, who subsequently gives him the material for his suit.

When he arrives in Paris and presents the material to the skilled tailor, the man measures his body and says: "Sorry, Mr. Kissinger, but a man your size needs at least another two inches of material."

Surprised, Dr. Kissinger continues his journey to London. There, the tailor says, "I am sorry, Mr. Secretary of State, but to turn this into a suit for your physique, I need another three inches of the material."

Disappointed, he arrives in Beijing. There the widely acclaimed Chinese tailor remarks, "I really don't understand what you were thinking, Mr. Kissinger. Your body is far larger than this material. We need another five inches."

An angry Dr. Kissinger arrives in Tel Aviv. He presents the material to a local Jewish tailor. The tailor measures him and says: "You actually don't need so much material, but I will cut off some of it and will turn the remainder of it into a stunning suit."

Kissinger is astonished. "Can you explain this to me," he asks the tailor. "I have traveled the world, and everybody claims that I need much more material. What is going on here?"

"Oh, it's quite simple," the Israeli tailor responds. "In Italy, you are a big man; in Paris, you are even a bigger man; in London, you are a great man, and in Beijing, you are a giant."

"But here in Israel, you are a small man."

The Debate on Noah's Persona

What is nothing but a classic Jewish joke becomes reality when it comes to one of the most important figures in the Hebrew Bible—the man who single-handedly saved civilization: Noah. What the tailor told Kissinger is what we actually did to poor Noah. We cut him down half-his-size, which is both astounding and problematic.

The Torah states in the opening of this week's portion:

This is the history of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was wholesome in his generation; Noah walked with G-d.

The Talmud,[1] and Rashi, ever sensitive to nuance, take note of the fact that the words, "in his generation" are superfluous. Obviously, Noah lived and functioned in his generation. Why could the Torah not say simply "Noach was a righteous man, wholesome he was; Noah walked with G-d?"

The Talmud offers two opposing explanations. In the words of Rashi:

Among the sages, there are those who interpret this as praise of Noah: If he was righteous in his [corrupt] generation, certainly he would have been even more righteous had he lived in a generation of righteous people. Others interpret it negatively: In relation to his wicked generation he was righteous; had he been in Abraham's generation he would not have amounted to anything.[2]

Who was Noah? is the question. Was he really a man of extraordinary stature or just a cut above the rest? Did G-d save him because he was a "perfect tzaddik," or there was nobody better?

Why Denigrate a Hero?

Yet there is something disturbing about this discussion. The Torah is clearly trying to highlight Noah's virtue. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d," is how the previous portion concludes.[3] Then, we have the above verse: "This is the history of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was wholesome in his generation; Noah walked with G-d." Later in the portion G-d says to Noah: "I have found you righteous before Me in this generation." G-d, clearly, is trying to extoll Noah. What drove some Rabbis to denigrate him and say that relative to other generations he would amount to nothing special?

Besides, when you can choose a complimentary interpretation and perspective, what drives some to choose a negative and condescending interpretation?[4] It runs against the instructions of the Torah to give people the benefit of the doubt.

What is more, Noah is the only person in the entire Tanach who is called a Tzaddik, a perfectly righteous individual. G-d tells Noah: "I have found you to be a tzaddik before me in this generation." [5] And we, the Jews, say: Yes, but not really...

There are various interpretations. One of my favorite ones was presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in 1964.[6] Not only were the Rabbis not trying to minimize Noah's

virtues; they actually wanted to highlight his praises even more. Equally important, they were trying to teach us all a transformative lesson.

Who Can Change the World?

What did Noach accomplish? He saved all mankind. In the absence of Noach, humanity would have become extinct soon after it has begun. Single-handedly he ensured the continuity of life on earth. He is the man who builds an ark, rescues all living organisms, and ensures our world would survive.

An achievement indeed, if there was ever one.

And who is the individual who achieves this feat? A person called by the Torah “a man of the earth.”[7] The only story the Torah tells us about Noach, outside of constructing the Ark and spending a year in it during the Great Flood, is that he was a farmer; he planted a vineyard, became intoxicated, and exposed himself. That’s all. The last thing we hear about him is that he lay there in his tent, drunk and bare.

The Rabbis deduce from the text that “Noach, also, was of those people who were wanting in faith: he believed and he did not believe that the Flood would come, and he would not enter the Ark until the waters forced him to do so.”[8]

Noach was a fine man, who lived a decent, moral life, and tried to do what G-d wanted, but was not without his flaws, doubts, and struggles. Compared to Abraham he would not amount to much.

But look what this simple fellow achieved! In a society dripping with greed and temptation, Noach held to his morals, walked with G-d, and swam against the tide, saving the planet from destruction. Civilization survived not because of a towering, titanic figure; but because of a simple man who had the courage to live morally when everyone around him behaved despicably.

Remarkably, by degrading Noach and stating that in other generations Noach would be eclipsed, the Rabbis turned him into the most inspiring figure, someone who serves as a model for all of us ordinary men and women. Noach is my hero, the hero of the ordinary cut-of-the-mill individual who is no great thinker, warrior, leader, or man of transcendence. By explaining the biblical text the way they did, the Sages turned Noach into a symbol for us ordinary people, who appreciate a fine cup of wine and a little schnaps, how we can make a difference in people’s lives.

The message of Noach is life-changing. You don’t need to be Abraham or Moses to transform the world. Noach was just another kid on the block, but look what he did! With your own courage not to toe the line of corruption, fakeness, and falsehood, with a little gentleness, friendliness, compassion, kindness, and goodness you can save lives, ignite sparks, and create an “ark” of sanity amidst a raging flood.

Noach was not a saint? Thank goodness. I have heard enough about saints in my life; now tell me about real people, who struggle with fear, doubt, and pain. Tell me about the guy whose IQ was not 180; he was not valedictorian of his school; he did not get a full scholarship to Oxford; he was not a tycoon or bestselling author. He was not a guru or a holy man. He was not the greatest warrior, thinker, artist, or leader. He was just a guy trying to do the right thing when everyone around him descended to greed and apathy. And look what he accomplished.

In the presence of great moral giants, he might be eclipsed, the Talmud says. Standing near Abraham he would appear insignificant. And that is exactly what made him so significant! He set a standard for those of us who appear in our own eyes as insignificant.

Uniform Biographies

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, dean of Yeshiva Rabanu Chaim Berlin and author of *Pachad Yitzchak*, laments in a letter about biographies published on the lives of Jewish leaders and rabbis. They are “cookie cutter” biographies, in which every one of them was born a holy genius. At the age of six, he knew the entire Tanach by heart, and at the age of twelve he mastered the Talmud, and his mother had to force him to eat. There is almost no trace of struggle, failure, crisis, doubt, anxiety, temptation, confusion, adversity, and the winding viscidities of the path toward individual self-discovery. Besides it being a dishonest portrayal, it deprives the biographies of having educational value. How can I try to emulate a flawless and brilliant saint?

It is an educational mistake to see spiritual success in the absence of struggle and the repression of authentic emotions. Look at Noach. He was a flawed man, and he saved the world!

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked, he came upon a young girl who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the girl and asked what she was doing. Without looking up from his task, the girl simply replied, ‘I’m saving these starfish, Sir.’

The old man chuckled aloud, ‘Young woman, there are tens of thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?’

The girl picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water, and turning to the man, said, “It made a difference to that one!”

So today, decide to emulate Noach: A simple man who was true to his soul and his G-d. In your own way, stand up to lies, greed, and promiscuity. Become a beacon of light, love, and hope. Construct an ark where others can find shelter from a flood of pain and insanity. Stop giving the excuse that you are just a regular guy, minding your own business. All of us can be Noach’s.

“I’m only one, but I am one. I can’t do everything but I can do something, and what I can do, I ought to do.”[9]

[1] Sanhedrin 108a

[2] In the Talmud *ibid.* it’s a debate between Rabbi Yochanan (derogatory) and Reish Lakish (complimentary). Rabbi Chanina continues to say: “Rabbi Yochanan’s view may be illustrated by the parable of a jar of wine stored in a cellar filled with jars of vinegar. In such a place, the fragrance of the wine is sensed, because of the vinegar’s fumes; in any other place, its fragrance might not be sensed. Rabbi Oshaiya said: Resh Lakish’s view may be illustrated by a vial of fragrant oil lying amid excrement: if its fragrance is sensed even in such surroundings, how much more so amid spices!”

Perhaps we can suggest that these two sages’ dispute is connected to their own life story. Rabbi Yochanan was raised in piety and holiness; Reish Lakish was a gangster and gladiator who later became one of the greatest Torah sages of his age (Talmud Bava Metizah 84b). Reish Lakish, remembering his past, and knowing the dark side of human nature and its great potency, teaches that if Noach could succeed in his corrupt generation to live morally, certainly he would have been righteous in a more spiritual generation. Reish Lakish understood the depth of the human struggle against darkness and the enormity of the challenge some people face, and he could only stand in awe of Noach’s moral standing in his generation. Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, could not fully appreciate what Noach had to contend against. Yet the questions in this essay are still unanswered.

[3] Genesis 6:8

[4] In the Ethics of our Fathers (1:6) we are enjoined to “judge every person favorably,” giving them the benefit of the doubt. It is the sages who go so far as to declare that “the Torah is loath to speak negatively even of a non-kosher animal” (Talmud Bava Basra 123a; Pesachim 3a), a lesson derived from this very portion of Noach! If the clause “in his generations” can be understood both ways, why propose a negative interpretation? In the words of the famed Polish-Italian Talmudic sage and commentator the Beer Sheva (Rabbi Yissachar Ber Eilenberg, 1550-1623):

כל ימי קוהה מאחר שאין לו הכרע אם לגנאי או לשבח נאמר בדורותי, א”כ קשה על רבי יוחנן למה משכו נפשו לדורשו לגנאי” (באר שבע סנהדרין דף קה, א

“All my life I was grinding (my teeth). Since the term “in his generation,” can be explained positively or negatively, why did Reb Yochanan’s soul compel him to explain it disgracefully?”

[5] Genesis 7:1

[6] The Rebbe shared this during a public address (“farbrengen”) on Shabbos Parshas Noach 5725, October 10, 1964. Published in *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 5 pp. 281-283.

On another occasion, the Rebbe shared another explanation (*Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25 Parshas Noach). Briefly: The sages had some independent criticism of Noach for not trying to save his generation (see *Zohar Bereishis* 66; 107). When they observed the term “in his generation,” they understood that this was written to underscore the flaw of Noach. They felt it was important to bring out this flaw not in order to denigrate Noach (especially since in his position he may have done the best he could) but to caution others not to follow in the same direction. What is more, Noach himself would appreciate this interpretation so that his behavior (which may have been right during his time, under those unique circumstances) should not serve as a paradigm for others at other times.

[7] Genesis 9:20

[8] Rashi to Genesis 7:7, quoting Midrash Rabah Bereishis 32:6

[9] My thanks to Rabbi Moshe Kahn (Melbourne) for his assistance in developing this insight.]

## May I Daven in English?

### Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

*The end of parshas Noach teaches about the beginning of languages...*

Question #1:

I received the following e-mail question from Verna Acular:

I much prefer to pray in English, since reading the siddur in Hebrew provides me with no emotional connection to G-d. I was told to read the Hebrew even though I cannot comprehend it; yet, other people I know were told that they could pray in English. Which approach is correct?

Question #2:

Bella, a middle-aged, new immigrant from Central Europe, struggles to ask the rabbi:

Hungarian is the only language that I can read and understand. Someone told me that, now that I am living in the United States, I cannot pray in Hungarian, but must learn to read either English or Hebrew. Is this so? I am really too old to learn a new language.

Question #3:

Bracha Acharona asked me the following:

I heard that some authorities rule that if one recited a bracha in Japanese before eating, one should not recite the bracha again, even if one does not understand a word of Japanese; yet, if one bensch in Japanese, one would be required to bensch again. Is there indeed a difference between the brachos recited before and after eating?

Those That Can and Those That Cannot

The Mishnah (Sotah 32a) supplies a rather long list of mitzvos that are fulfilled only when recited in Hebrew and those that are fulfilled when recited in any language. For example, one cannot fulfill the requirements of chalitzah (see Devarim 25:7-10), duchening (see Bamidbar 6:24-26), and the narration that accompanies bikkurim (see Devarim 26:5-11), unless one recites the exact Hebrew words that the Torah cites. On the other hand, other mitzvos, including the reciting of shema, prayer (including shemoneh esrei), and birkas hamazon (bensching) can be fulfilled by translating the relevant passages into a language which that [K1] one understands. Indeed, the Gemara (Brachos 40b) records an instance in which an individual named Binyomin the Shepherd bensch in Aramaic, and Rav ruled that he had fulfilled his requirement. The Gemara explains the reason for why some mitzvos may be fulfilled in translation, but not others, on the basis of several intricate interpretations from various verses. Which is preferable?

Having established that one may pray in a vernacular, the first question on which we will focus is whether it is preferable or perhaps even essential for someone who does not understand Hebrew to pray in a language that he understands, or whether it is preferred to pray in Hebrew, even though it is not understood.

Tosafos' opinion

From Tosafos (Sotah op. cit.) we see that someone who does not understand Hebrew and recites a prayer, shema, or bensching in Hebrew does not fulfill the mitzvah. Tosafos asks why the Mishnah omits hearing megillah from its list of mitzvos that may be fulfilled in any language. Tosafos answers that the mitzvah of megillah is qualitatively different from all the other mitzvos mentioned in this Mishnah, because one who does not understand Hebrew fulfills the mitzvah of megillah in Hebrew. Tosafos clearly understands that someone who prays, bensch or reads shema in a language he does not understand does not fulfill the mitzvah, even if the language is Hebrew, and the Mishnah is listing mitzvos that someone who doesn't understand Hebrew will fulfill only in the vernacular. Thus, according to Tosafos' opinion, Verna should be reciting her prayers in English, and Bella should recite them in Hungarian.

Hebrew for the Hungarians

Although Tosafos holds this way, later authorities reject this conclusion. The Keren Orach notes that, according to Tosafos, someone who does not understand Hebrew will be unable to fulfill the mitzvos of bensching and davening if he does not have a siddur handy with a translation in a language that he understands. The Keren Orach cites other early authorities who answered Tosafos' question (why Megillah is not cited in the Mishnah) in a different way, and he concludes that one who prayed, bensch or read shema in Hebrew fulfills the mitzvah, even if he does not understand Hebrew, providing that he knew that he was about to fulfill the mitzvah.

Quoting other authorities, the Mishnah Berurah (62:2), rules that someone who does not understand Hebrew should preferably daven, bensch and recite shema in Hebrew.

What does veshinantam mean?

The Mishnah Berurah adds an additional reason to recite shema in Hebrew; there are several words in shema that are difficult to translate, or whose meaning is unclear. For example, the word veshinantam may often be translated as and you

shall teach them, but this translation does not express the full meaning of the word. The word for teach them in Hebrew is velimad'tem, which is used in the second parsha of shema. The word veshinantam means teaching students until they know the Torah thoroughly, and simply translating this word as and you shall teach them does not explain the word adequately.

This difference in meaning is reflected in Targum Onkeles, where velimadtem is translated vesalfun, whereas veshinantam is translated u'sesaninun, which comes from the Aramaic root that is equivalent to the Hebrew veshinantam. Thus, Aramaic possesses two different verbs, one of which means to teach and the other meaning to teach until known thoroughly, whereas English lacks a short way of expressing the latter idea.

I have heard it suggested that one may alleviate this problem of reciting shema in English by translating the word veshinantam with the entire clause you shall teach it to your sons until they know it thoroughly. This approach should seemingly resolve the concern raised by the Mishnah Berurah, although I am unaware of an English translation that renders the word veshinantam in this way.

Other hard translations

Whether or not one can translate veshinantam accurately, the Mishnah Berurah questions how one will translate the word es, since it has no equivalent in most languages. He further notes that the word totafos, which refers to the tefillin worn on the head, is also difficult to translate. However, when we recite these words in Hebrew, we avoid the need to know the exact translation, since we are using the words the Torah itself used. The Mishnah Berurah feels that, for the same reasons, someone who can read but does not understand Hebrew should recite kiddush, bensching, davening and his other brachos in Hebrew.

Although the Mishnah Berurah does not mention this predicament, a problem similar to the one he raises concerns the translation of the Name of G-d. When reciting a bracha or any of the above-mentioned requirements in a different language, one must be careful to translate this Name accurately (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:40:27). Rav Moshe Feinstein notes this problem in the context of the anecdote I mentioned above about Binyomin the Shepherd, who bensch in Aramaic. The Gemara records that Binyomin referred to G-d as Rachmana. In a teshuvah on the subject, Rav Moshe notes that although the word Rachmana obviously derives from the same source as the word rachum, mercy, one would not fulfill the requirement of reciting a bracha by substituting the word rachum for Hashem's Name. Thus, Rav Moshe asks, how could Binyomin the Shepherd have fulfilled his bracha by reciting the translation of the word rachum? Rav Moshe answers that although the source of the word Rachmana and the word rachum are the same, Rachmana is the translation of G-d's Name in Aramaic, and therefore it is used in Aramaic prayers and blessings. However, rachum is not a translation of G-d, but an attribute of G-d, and its recital in a bracha is not adequate.

We thus realize that someone translating Hashem's Name into any language must be careful to do so accurately.

Is "G-d" correct?

I have seen two common ways of translating the Name of Hashem into English, one as Lord and the other as G-d. Translating His Name as Lord is based on the meaning of the Name Adnus as Adon hakol, the Lord of all, which is the basic understanding one is required to have when reciting His Name. However, I have noticed that some recent translations now transliterate the Name in English as Hashem. This is not an accurate translation, and a person reciting the bracha this way will not fulfill his responsibility. I strongly suggest that the publishers not do this, since they are performing a disservice for people using their translation.

The position of the Sefer Chassidim

Notwithstanding that the Mishnah Berurah prefers that someone who does not understand Hebrew daven, bensch, and recite shema in Hebrew, the Sefer Chassidim (#588) advises, "A G-d-fearing man or woman who does not understand Hebrew who asks, tell them to learn the prayers in the language that they understand. Prayer can be recited only with the understanding of the heart, and if the heart does not understand what the mouth expresses, nothing is accomplished. For this reason, it is best to pray in a language one understands.

He states this even more clearly in a different passage (#785).

It is better for a person to pray and recite shema and brachos in a language that he comprehends, rather than pray in Hebrew and not understand... It is for this reason that the Talmud, both in Bavel and in Eretz Yisrael, was written in Aramaic, so that even the unlettered can understand the mitzvos.

The Sefer Chassidim's position is subsequently quoted by the Magen Avraham (101:5), who also cites this approach in the name of the Asarah Ma'amaros of the Rama miFanu.

The Yad Efrayim's approach

The Yad Efrayim quotes the Magen Avraham (who ruled as the Sefer Chassidim), but contends that one should recite the tefillah in Hebrew. To quote him: In our days, when there is no one who can translate the Hebrew accurately, one should rebuke anyone who follows a lenient route and prays in the vernacular. Rather, one should not separate himself from the community that reads the prayer in Hebrew, and one fulfills the mitzvah even if he does not

understand. Someone concerned about the issues raised by Sefer Chassidim should learn enough basic understanding of Hebrew to know what he is asking. Although he does not understand every word, this is not a concern... If he does not want to learn Hebrew, he should pray in Hebrew with the community, and afterwards read the prayer in translation.

Thus, the Yad Efrayim is a strong advocate of praying only in Hebrew, and he is presumably one of the authorities upon whom the Mishnah Berurah based his ruling.

At this point, we can return to Verna's question:

I much prefer to pray in English, since reading the siddur provides me with no emotional connection to G-d. I was told to read the Hebrew, even though I cannot comprehend it; yet, other people I know were told that they could pray in English. Which approach is correct?

Verna has been told to follow the ruling of the Yad Efrayim and the Mishnah Berurah, which is the most commonly followed approach today. The "other people" that Verna mentions were instructed to follow the approach of the Magen Avraham and the Sefer Chassidim. It is also possible that the "other people" cannot read Hebrew properly. Someone who cannot read Hebrew has no choice but to recite prayers in the best translation that he/she can find.

Is this the language of the country?

At this point, I would like to address Bella's predicament:

Hungarian is the only language that I read and understand. Someone told me that, now that I am living in the United States, I cannot pray in Hungarian, but must learn to read either English or Hebrew. Is this so?

What is the halacha if someone does not understand the language of the country in which he/she lives? Can one fulfill the mitzvot of shema, brachos and davening by reciting these prayers in his native language, notwithstanding the fact that few people in his new country comprehend this language?

Although this may seem surprising, the Bi'ur Halacha rules that one fulfills the mitzvot in a vernacular only when this is the language that is commonly understood in the country in which he is currently located. The Bi'ur Halacha based his ruling on a statement of the Ritva (in the beginning of his notes to the Rif on Nedarim), who implies that halacha recognizes something as a language only in the time and place that a people has chosen to make this into their spoken vernacular.

Following this approach, one who recites a bracha in America in a language that most Americans do not understand is required to recite the bracha again. Bella was indeed told the position of the Bi'ur Halacha that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of praying in the United States in Hungarian or any other language that is not commonly understood, other than Hebrew.

Rav Gustman's position

Other authorities dispute the Bi'ur Halacha's conclusion, demonstrating that this concern of the Ritva refers only to a slang or code, but not to a proper language (Kuntrisei Shiurim of Rav Gustman, Nedarim page 11; and others). This means that if someone prayed or recited a bracha in something that is not considered a true language, he would not fulfill his mitzvah and would be required to recite the prayer or bracha again. However, although most Americans do not understand Hungarian, this is a bona fide language, and Bella fulfills the mitzvah by davening in Hungarian. Rav Gustman writes that he told many Russian baalei teshuvah that they could pray in Russian when they were living in Israel or the United States, even though Russian is not understood by most people in either country. He acknowledges that, according to the Bi'ur Halacha, this would not fulfill the mitzvah.

Must one understand the foreign language?

At this point, we will address Bracha's brachos question:

I heard that some authorities rule that if one recited a bracha in Japanese before eating, one should not recite the bracha again, even if one does not know a word of Japanese; yet if one benschd in Japanese, one would be required to bensch again. Is there indeed a difference between a bracha before eating and one after?

According to Tosafos, someone can fulfill reciting the brachos before eating, Hallel and Kiddush even in a secular language that one does not understand. Tosafos contends that we see from the Mishnah that these mitzvot have a difference in halacha with bensching, davening and shema, where one fulfills the mitzvah only in a language that one understands.

Do we follow Tosafos' opinion?

Although the Magen Avraham (introduction to Orach Chayim 62) rules in accordance with this Tosafos, most later commentaries do not (Keren Orah and Rav Elazar Landau on Sotah ad loc.; Bi'ur Halacha 62 s.v. Yachol; Aruch Hashulchan 62:3). Several authorities state that they do not understand Tosafos' position that there is a difference between shema, shemoneh esrei and birkas hamazon, which can only be recited in a language one understands, and Kiddush, Hallel, birkas hamitzvos and brachos before eating, which Tosafos rules one may recite even in a language that one does not comprehend.

I suggest the following explanation of Tosafos' view: The drasha of Chazal states that one fulfills shema only in a language that one understands. This is logical, because shema is accepting the yoke of Heaven, and how can one do this without

comprehending the words? The same idea applies to the shemoneh esrei -- how can one pray if he does not understand what he is saying? Birkas hamazon is also a very high level of thanks, and what type of acknowledgement is it, if one does not know the meaning of the words he is saying? However, one can praise in a language that he does not understand, as evidenced by the fact that chazzanim or choirs may sing beautiful praise, although they do not necessarily comprehend every word. Similarly, as long as one knows that kiddush sanctifies Shabbos, he fulfills the mitzvah, even if he does not understand the words.

Conclusion

Some people, who cannot read Hebrew at all, have no choice but to pray in the language that they can read and understand. However, anyone who can should accept the challenge of studying the prayers a bit at a time, thereby gradually developing both fluency and comprehension. In the interim, they can read the translation of each paragraph first, and then read the Hebrew, which will help them develop a full understanding of the prayers as Chazal wrote and organized them.

---

### *Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha*

*For the week ending 23 September 2017 / 3 Tishri 5778*

*Of Elul, L'David, and Golems*

*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 Malbin, 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 "sheraik 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'hadgil 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'hadgil 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 monkier 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 Yaavev, 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 Asuros Ch. 1, 24).

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

[11] Bechor Shor (in his commentary to Chullin 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 Pelishi Avodah Zarah "Dagon" (Shmuel I Ch. 5: 2 - 7), which many, including Rashi (ad loc. 2 s.v. etzel), 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 also Radak (Shmuel I Ch. 5:4 and Teshuvos Donash al Machberes Menachem (London, 1855 edition, pg. 58), as well as Haachros 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 Mitvos, 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 Moamid (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'hadgil 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://f0.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=Xz1IjBwNXE&spfload=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.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda

This article was written 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!

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M' Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Halacha, serves as the Sho'el U'Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

© 1995-2022 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

#### לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

## [The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in Combining Traditional and Academic Bible Methodologies](#)

Byline:  
Rabbi Hayyim Angel

The growing popularity of what Rabbi Shalom Carmy calls the “literary-theological” approach to Tanakh study has been transforming the way we approach our most sacred texts. This methodology demands a finely tuned text reading, along with a focus on the religious significance of the passage. The premises of this methodology include the following:

1. The words of our Sages and later classical commentators are central to the way we understand the revealed word of God; and
2. It is vital to study biblical passages in their literary and historical context. [\[1\]](#)

This article on the Tower of Babel offers a “textbook lesson” in combining traditional rabbinic commentary with contemporary academic Bible scholarship. These two approaches begin with different sets of assumptions, but each gives us access to greater meaning in the Torah. Taken together, we emerge with a fuller picture than with either one by itself.

### **Text Analysis**

We will first explore the basic text issues, and we then will turn to layers of interpretation—both traditional and literary-historical.

Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.” The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, and the Lord said, “If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another’s speech.” Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the



---

whole earth. (Gen. 11:1-9)

Our narrative begins with a united humanity living together. Yehudah Kiel notes that Shinar is likely the Torah's way of saying Sumer. Kiel also argues that the story need not refer literally to *all* humanity; it may refer simply to the people living in that region. <sup>[2]</sup>

The protagonists in this text migrate eastward until they reach a *bikah*, translated by Ibn Ezra and Yehudah Kiel as a plain. The Babylonians depended on brick-making for their building projects, since they did not have an adequate stone supply. While historically accurate, we may ask why the Torah places such emphasis on this seemingly trivial detail.

Verse 4 contains the crux of the builders' intent: "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world." "A tower with its top in the sky" appears lexically similar to our term "skyscraper." Similar terminology appears in Deuteronomy in reference to the high walls surrounding Canaanite cities (Deut. 1:28; 9:1). The builders of the Tower wanted to be remembered for having built this monumental structure (Ibn Ezra, Radak). On the surface, there does not appear to be anything unusually sinful about their intent. They were interested in holding their growing community together with the help of the Tower, and being remembered by later generations.

However, God thwarts them. God's "descent" does not reflect some primitive notion of God's being "up" and needing to come down to earth to figure out what is happening. To the contrary, God knows that the people are building the Tower. Rashi therefore explains that God is teaching the notion that judges must investigate cases thoroughly.

It is not evident why God should feel threatened, or what the builders of the Tower were doing wrong that God needed to intervene. It also is remarkable that the Torah states that Babylonia was named after linguistic confusion, given that the Babylonians themselves referred to their city as Babel. We turn now to rabbinic commentary to explore these questions.

### **Rabbinic Interpretation**

One classical explanation of the Tower of Babel is found in the Talmud:

---

R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: They split up into three parties. One said, 'Let us ascend and dwell there;' the second, 'Let us ascend and serve idols;' and the third said, 'Let us ascend and wage war [with God].'...It has been taught. R. Nathan said: They were all bent on idolatry. (*Sanhedrin* 109a)

These Sages explain that the Tower reflects idolatry and rebellion against God. Rashi adopts their analysis, as well. The advantage of this interpretation is that God's strong reaction makes sense. God felt threatened and therefore intervened to thwart their plans. This interpretation also gains credibility insofar as this narrative is the only one spanning from Noah to Abraham and his family. It is reasonable to surmise that this story must be significant beyond its teaching of how people speak many languages.

However, one may ask whether this reading fits the text. Where is there mention of a rebellion against God or idolatry in this passage? Ibn Ezra summarily dismisses this interpretation:

The builders of the tower were not so foolish as to think that they could go to the heavens...The text reveals their intent—to build a large city for their settlement, and the Tower would be a sign of their glory and also their location for shepherds who ventured away. They would also preserve their name all the days of the Tower...The builders hoped that they would never scatter, but this was not God's plan, and they did not realize that. (Ibn Ezra on Gen. 11:3)

However, commentators seeking the plain sense of the text (*pashtanim*) also struggle to determine the meaning of this narrative. Ibn Ezra argues that the people did not do anything sinful. God opposed the project since He had blessed them to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). God scattered them to fulfill His blessing to humanity. In a similar vein, Ralbag maintains that the people did not sin, but God desires human diversity rather than conformity and therefore scattered them.

Several later commentators assume that the builders of the Tower must have done something sinful, as God appears threatened. They modify the views of Ibn Ezra or Ralbag and insist that the people deliberately wanted to thwart God's blessing to fill the earth (Radak, Joseph Bekhor Shor) or to create a conformist, totalitarian regime (Yitzhak Arama, Samson Rafael Hirsch, Netziv).

Abarbanel submits a surprising thesis. Brick-making symbolizes human creativity, and he argues that technology ultimately causes problems. Of course, God does not outright forbid technology, but it is not the ideal course for humanity. Unlike the other interpretations we have seen, Abarbanel addresses the textual element of brick-making.

Although the talmudic interpretation of idolatry appears to read a lot into the text, the interpretations of the later *pashtanim* also do not appear evident in the text. Other than Abarbanel's anti-technology reading, the other interpretations do not explain the Torah's emphasis on brick-making. Moreover, none of the above interpretations explains why the Babylonians would refer to their own city as "confusion." The cryptic nine verses of this narrative pose difficulties in arriving at a compelling reading.

### **Ancient Near Eastern Context**

Over the past century, scholarship has progressed significantly with the archaeological discovery of many artifacts and written documents from the ancient Near East. Much of this section summarizes the groundbreaking work of Moshe David (Umberto) Cassuto, and the subsequent discussions of Nahum Sarna and

[\[3\]](#) Elhanan Samet. They argue that the Tower of Babel narrative is a polemic against the worldview of the nations, in particular Babylonia. In every ancient Babylonian city, there were temples, always accompanied with a tower called a ziqqurat. This term derives from the Akkadian *zaqaru*, "to rise up high," or "step pyramid." In Babylonia, the great ziqqurat was the Temple of Marduk—the patron deity of Babylonia. The Temple was called *E-sag-ila* ("the house with a raised head"), and its tower was called *etemen-an-ki* ("the house of the foundation of the heavens and earth"). It appears that this temple originally was built in Hammurabi's time (18<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E.), approximately the same time as Abraham. The Babylonians took such great pride in their temple that they composed myths that attributed its building to the gods:

Marduk, the king of the gods divided all the Anunnaki (=various gods) above and below...The Anunnaki opened their mouths and said to Marduk, their lord: "Now, o lord, you who have caused our deliverance, what shall be our homage to you? Let us build a shrine";...When Marduk heard this, brightly glowed his features, like the day: "Construct Babylon, whose building you have requested, let its brickwork be fashioned..." the Anunnaki applied the implement; for one whole year they molded bricks. When the second year

---

arrived, they raised high the head of Esagila equalling Apsu (=corresponded to the depths of the ocean. Apsu was one of the original two gods in world, according to this myth.)...(Akkadian Creation Epic, Tablet VI, lines 39-62)<sup>[4]</sup>

The ruins of the Temple of Marduk were found between 1889 and 1917 by German archaeologists. It was gigantic, about 300 feet high, rising from a square base of equal size. There is little question that the Torah is discussing this temple. Archaeologists have unearthed the biblical Tower of Babel and other documents that describe what the Babylonians thought of their prized temple.

A ziqqurat was built as a surrogate mountain, designed as a meeting place between the gods and people. Priests could ascend to the top on elaborate staircases in order to encounter the gods. Phrases such as “its top in the sky” and “to make a name for oneself” appear regularly on Akkadian building

inscriptions.<sup>[5]</sup> *E-sag-ila*, the house with a raised head, now appears strikingly similar to the Torah’s quoting the Tower’s builders as wanting “a tower with its top in the sky” (Gen. 11:4).

Additionally, the Babylonian Creation Epic cited above marvels at the brick-making required for the Tower. In this myth, it took *the gods* one year to make enough bricks to build the Temple of Marduk! The Torah mocks this claim, noting that the Tower and its bricks were built by people. This detail in the Babylonian epic helps explain why the Torah focuses on the brick-making aspect of the project.

God’s “descent” in the Torah narrative also speaks against the idea of a ziqqurat. The physical height of a mountain or structure does not bring anyone closer to God. God descended to thwart the Tower before it was completed.

In this reading of the Torah narrative, Babylonian society was guilty of the ultimate arrogance. They were excessively proud of the Temple of Marduk, and claimed that their gods built it. They also built the Tower to make for themselves a name, usurping a supposedly religious structure for self-aggrandizement.

We now can understand the Torah’s explanation for the city name, *Bavel*, confusion. The Babylonians called their city Babel, from the Akkadian *bab-ilim*, “the gate of the god.” They considered their city to be the religious center of the world. The Hebrew etymology, then, is a “midrash” of the Torah to mock the Babylonians. You think you are the gate of the god, but in

fact you are completely confused!

To summarize, the sin of the Tower of Babel was supreme arrogance of a polytheistic, idolatrous society. This interpretation also is the view of the talmudic Sages (*Sanhedrin* 109a) quoted earlier. Living in Babylonia, the Sages well understood what the Torah was teaching. With our knowledge of the ancient setting, their interpretation is closely wedded to the text of the Torah, and is the most convincing of all the suggestions cited above.

### **The Significance of the Narrative**

Following this interpretation, Yehezkel Kaufmann observed that until this point in the Book of Genesis, all people are assumed to be monotheists. The Tower of Babel represents the moment when idolatry entered human culture. As a result, Abraham was chosen to leave Babylonia and to teach humanity about its original vision of monotheism. <sup>[6]</sup>

As in the Tower of Babel, the Garden of Eden narrative also revolves around people overstepping their human boundaries and God appearing to feel threatened by human actions:

And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" (Gen. 3:22)

Both narratives also have God using the unusual plural "we" form when referring to Himself. Lyle Eslinger explains that this unusual form is used specifically when establishing boundaries between the divine and human realms. <sup>[7]</sup> Ramban (on 11:2) notes further that Eden and Babel were similar sins, and therefore the protagonists were exiled each time.

The Talmud poignantly casts God and human arrogance as diametrically opposed, to the point where God's presence in this world is threatened by arrogance:

If one walks with a stiff bearing [i.e., with arrogance] even for four cubits, it is as if he pushed against the heels of the Divine Presence, since it is written, The whole earth is full of His glory (Isa. 6:3). (*Berakhot* 43b)

Monotheism is not simply a matter of the number of deities one serves. Rather, it promotes humility. God's Presence is invited in through that humility, as exemplified by Moses who was the humblest of all people (Num. 12:3) and the greatest prophet (Num. 12:6-8). The Tower of Babel narrative teaches that idolatry is rooted in the ultimate human arrogance.

Yehudah Elitzur further observes that the term *sulam* (ladder) appears only in Jacob's dream with the angels ascending and descending. More significantly, the term *sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, the gateway to heaven, appears only here:

Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven (*sha'ar ha-Shamayim*)." (Gen. 28:17)

Elitzur argues that this narrative is the Torah's response to the Tower of Babel. The Babylonians called themselves *bab-ilim*, the gate of the god, similar to *sha'ar ha-Shamayim*. God descended to the Tower of Babel, mocking its builders for thinking that they had connected heaven and earth with their ziqqurat. In reality, they were arrogant and confused. In contrast, Jacob's ladder effectively connects the heavens and earth, as angels freely ascend and descend. [\[8\]](#)

Finally, Zephaniah prophesied that in the ideal future, arrogance shall be replaced by all humanity again being pure of speech, i.e., being God-fearing.

For then I will make the peoples pure of speech, so that they all invoke the Lord by name and serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush, My suppliants shall bring offerings to Me in Fair Puzai...For then I will remove the proud and exultant within you, and you will be haughty no more on My sacred mount. But I will leave within you a poor, humble folk, and they shall find refuge in the name of the Lord. (Zeph. 3:9-12)

This prophecy is the antidote to the Tower of Babel, which represents the arrogance and idolatry that led to people speaking many languages. In those medieval communities where the triennial cycle was used for Torah readings, this passage in Zephaniah fittingly was selected as the Haftarah for the reading of the Tower of Babel. [\[9\]](#)

To summarize, the Tower of Babel is of central importance to the early Genesis narratives. The Babylonians arrogantly presumed to establish the place where the heavens meet earth and that they could bring the gods down to earth by building high temples. They were self-aggrandizing by building a temple to make a name for themselves, and in their mythology they ascribed this monumental building project to the gods.

This is the moment in the Torah where idolatry is introduced. God shifts from focusing on all humanity to Abraham and his descendants, who were entrusted to teach the world about ethical monotheism. Humility brings God's presence closer. Arrogance is linked to idolatry and threatens God's presence.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we briefly explored facets of how to analyze the Tower of Babel narrative. We began with the basic text, pinpointing the major issues that need to be addressed. We then surveyed talmudic and later rabbinic commentary. Although insightful and illuminating, none of these sources fully addressed the various details of the text. A consideration of the ancient Near Eastern setting, coupled with the talmudic reading in Tractate *Sanhedrin*, provided a more satisfactory reading of the details of the narrative in a vacuum and in its surrounding context. This reading highlights a vital detail in the spiritual history of the world as presented by the Torah.

To round out the analysis, we considered other biblical reference that shed additional light on the theme that the Tower of Babel narrative teaches. The Garden of Eden narrative and the Tower of Babel both explore how people sometimes exceed their boundaries and this threatens their relationship with God, leading to exile. Jacob's humility and God's revelation are linked as the ideal connection between the heavens and the earth. Zephaniah prophetically anticipates a future era when the damage of the Tower of Babel is undone and the world unites again in humility and in serving God.

By the conclusion of the analysis, we can see how the rabbinic interpretations and ancient Near Eastern scholarship complement each other, enabling us to unlock a brief but powerful narrative that lies at the heart of the Torah's values.

## **Notes**

- [1] \_\_\_ See Shalom Carmy, "A Room with a View, but a Room of Our Own," in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), pp. 1-38.
- [2] \_\_\_ Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: Bereshit* vol. 1 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1997), pp. 279-280.
- [3] \_\_\_ Moshe David (Umberto) Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), pp. 154-169; Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), pp. 63-80; Elhanan Samet, *Iyyunim be-Parashot ha-Shavua* (first series) vol. 1 (Hebrew) ed. Ayal Fishler (Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'aliyot Press, 2002), pp. 21-30. Modified English version at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.60/02noach.htm>.
- [4] \_\_\_ Translation from James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 68-69.
- [5] \_\_\_ Ada Feyerick, *Genesis: World of Myths and Patriarchs* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 53.
- [6] \_\_\_ For further discussion of the subject of the Chosen People, see Hayyim Angel, "The Chosen People': An Ethical Challenge," *Conversations* 8 (Fall 2010), pp. 52-60; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 25-34. For a different approach, see Zvi Grumet, "The Revolution of Terah and Avraham," in this issue.
- [7] \_\_\_ Lyle Eslinger, "The Enigmatic Plurals Like 'One of Us' (Genesis I 26, III 22, and XI 7) in Hyperchronic Perspective," *VT* 56 (2006), pp. 171-184.
- [8] \_\_\_ Yehudah Elitzur, "The Tower of Babel and Jacob's Ladder" (Hebrew), in *Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra: Mehkarim Geografiyim Historiyim ve-Hagotiyim*, Yoel Elitzur and Amos Frisch (eds.), (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), pp. 46-48.
- [9] \_\_\_ See listing of the triennial Haftarat at the end of Yosef Ofer, "The Sections of the Prophets and Writings" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 58 (1989), pp. 155-189.

Byline:

Rabbi Hayyim Angel is the National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals ([jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org)). He has taught advanced Bible courses to undergraduate, graduate, and rabbinical students at Yeshiva University since 1996. He lectures widely in synagogues and schools throughout North America. He lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, with his wife and four children. This article appears in issue 15 of *Conversations*, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Author:

Angel, Hayyim



Issue number:

15

Page Nos.:

135-143

Date:

Winter 2013/5773

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

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

## I. TWO STORIES - AGAIN???

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

### A: THE NATURE OF EVIL

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

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

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

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

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

### B: THE MERIT OF NOAH

Q2: What was Noah's merit?

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

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

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

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

### C: HOW MANY ANIMALS?

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

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

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

The differences here are clear - not only numerically, but also teleologically. What is the purpose of "collecting" the

animals? In the first version, two animals of each kind are gathered in order to maintain the species (hence, one male and one female).

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

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

## **D: COVENANT - OR COMMITMENT?**

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

V1: "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come and with every living thing that is with you - birds, cattle and every wild beast as well - all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. I will maintain My covenant with you; never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth...This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come,. I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. That - God said to Noah - shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth." (9:9-17)

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

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

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

## **SUMMARY**

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

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

How many stories are there here? Are there two different narratives - or one multifaceted one? Bottom line - how many

animals were there? What was Noah's merit? Which "version" is "accurate"?

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

## **II. SCIENCE VS. TORAH**

### **CONFLICT OR ILLUSION?**

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

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

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

Responses to this apparent problem have fallen into three groups:

#### **GROUP A: THE REJECTIONISTS**

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

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

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

#### **GROUP B: THE INTEGRATIONISTS**

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

(A marvelous example of this is Ramban's comment on the phrase "Let us make Man in Our Image", troubling enough on theological grounds. Ramban explains that God is talking to the earth, creating a partnership whereby the earth would develop the body of Man and God would, upon completion of that process, fill that body with a Divine spirit. The notion of the earth "developing" the body is curiously close to the process outlined by Darwin - in the widest of strokes.)

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

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

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

### **GROUP C: THE TELEOLOGISTS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **III. THE "TWO ADAMS"**

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

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

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

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

We can now return to our questions.

#### **IV. BACK TO NOAH**

Why did God decide to destroy the earth?

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

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

This easily explains why Noah was chosen:

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Man's role as God's servant, where God presents himself as "Hashem", highlighting Divine compassion, it is his failure

to develop himself spiritually which must be corrected. To that end, the one man who is "righteous BEFORE Me" is saved - along with enough animals that will afford him the opportunity to re-forge the relationship of worship.

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

Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

# 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

\*\*\*\*\*  
**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER** www.tanach.org  
*In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag*  
**Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**  
 \*\*\*\*\*

**PARSHAT NOACH**

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

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

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

**INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

**FROM A LIST TO AN OUTLINE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**ENTER - 'TOLADOT'**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5	<b>Toldot Adam to Noach</b>
6->9	-> ha-mabul - The story of the Flood
10	<b>Toldot Bnei Noach</b> - Shem, Cham & Yefet
11:1-9	-> <b>Migdal Bavel</b> - The Tower of Babel
11	<b>Toldot Shem</b> until <b>Terach</b>
12->25	-> God's choice of <b>Avraham Avinu</b>
25-35	<b>Toldot Yitzchak</b> - story of Yaakov & Esav
36	<b>Toldot Esav</b> - story Esav's children
37- 50	<b>Toldot Yaakov</b> - 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 Noah	'dor ha-mabul' - the Flood
10-11	benei 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 Noah. 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 Noah 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, Noah then blesses his son Shem:

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

Now it is not by chance that Noah named his son - **Shem**. Most likely, Noah'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'.]

Noah 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 Noah! 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 ehpoche 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 kamocho' - **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 Noah found in Breishit 5:1-32 constitutes even a principle, let alone one more important than the famous dictum that one should love his neighbor as himself!?

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

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

C. See Tzefania 3:8-9 and its context, especially 'ki az ehpoche 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 Tzefania!!

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

D. Am Yisrael is later commanded in Sefer Dvarim to establish the mikdash 'ba-makom asher yivchar Hashem 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 bryat 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 Hashem** (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 Hashem!** (13:4 / see also 21:33).

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

### for PARSHAT NOACH - 3 additional shiurim

#### SHIUR #1

### TOLADOT BNEI NOACH 'Setting the stage' for Sefer Breishit

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

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

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

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

#### INTRODUCTION

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

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



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

### SPECIAL DETAILS

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

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

Most bizarre is the Torah's presentation of the descendants of SHEM (see 10:21-30). Instead of describing Shem's own children and grandchildren, this final "parshia" seems to focus instead on the children of EVER, who was only one of Shem's numerous great grandchildren! To verify this, first note the emphasis on this point in the 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 "I'hatchil" - to begin], and hence, the Torah now informs us that in the time of Enosh man **began** to 'call out in God's Name'. And indeed, Rashbam and Ibn Ezra explain this pasuk in this manner. [Note English translations of JPS and Jerusalem Bibles, in contrast to that of the Stone Chumash.]

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

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

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

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

- 1) "az huchal" , and
- 2) "I'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 - "I'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 Tzania 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 Tzania 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 Tzania 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.

=====

### **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