

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #1-2, November 1-2, 2024; 30 Tishrei, 5785 - 1 Chesvan 5785; Noach 5785; Rosh Hodesh Chesvan

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

As Israel's primary focus turns from Hamas to the evils of Iran, Gaza, Hezbollah, and their allies, we pray that Hashem will protect us during the coming year of 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world.

Since I was unable to post a Devrei Torah packet for Simchat Torah/Bereishis last week (because of a short week of non-Shabbat/Yom Tov days), I am starting with a few words on Bereishis before turning to Noach.

There are two leading explanations for creation. The theological thesis is that a super intelligent entity (God, or Hashem), pre-existing our world, created a world for humans and other life forms. A second theory, the scientific, maintains that a "big bang" or explosion of a very large body in space led to planets and other space entities; conditions came together to create conditions for life; after a very long period, various living creatures emerged and gradually led to the creation of plants and animals – including humans. (Neither theory explains the original existence of God or of the original heavenly bodies.) Which theory is more satisfying to a modern educated person?

Advances in science in recent decades have nearly exploded the "proof" that one cannot prove the existence of God. Rabbi David Fohrman has summarized much of the relevant new scientific evidence in his video, "*Finding God in Science*." Consider the "big bang" theory of the creation of the universe. Cosmologists have diagnosed the "**flatness problem**." If the subatomic particles from a big bang sped away too fast, gravity would not bring them together. If the particles moved too slowly, gravity would have stopped their acceleration. The estimated margin of error in speed is 1 in 10 to the 54th power. Next, the "**smoothness problem**" evaluates the conditions necessary for the particles to create clouds. If the particles were too large, the hydrogen clouds would be so large that they would collapse into black holes. If the particles were too smooth, gravity would not have brought them into clouds. British mathematician Roger Penrose estimated the margin for error at 1 in 10 to the 10,123rd power! Gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear weak force, and nuclear strong force all also needed to be in precise balance for a big bang to have been able to create a universe. It would be a huge stretch of the imagination for all these conditions, each of minute probability, to take place simultaneously to create a universe – even before the conditions required for such a universe to create life. It becomes much easier to believe that an intelligent force, which we call God, created our world. Suppose, however, that one accepts the big bang as an explanation for the origin of our universe. Who created the elements necessary for a big bang to occur? Avraham asked himself this question thousands of years ago and realized that there had to be an intelligent being to start the line of history.

This week, the parsha is Noach. According to the Torah, Noach is righteous, perfect in his generation (6:9). Torah commentators have debated whether this language means that Noach is a true tzadik or only a tzadik in comparison to others of his time (but not in comparison to Avraham or many other heroes in the Torah). The ambivalence over how great Noach is comes because he spends 120 years building a tevah (Ark) yet ends up with no followers.

Of the many messages below, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, seems most insightful. He discusses the individuals in the Torah to this point and their shortcomings. Adam and Chava, after eating from Hashem's special tree, deny personal responsibility by blaming each other and the snake. After killing his brother, Cain denies moral responsibility and claims that he is not responsible for protecting his brother. Noach, the one righteous man in an evil world, spends 120 years building a tevah in public sight, tells everyone who asks what he is doing – but never urges anyone to perform teshuvah. He fails collective responsibility. The people in Shinar who invent bricks and decide to build a tower to heaven want to act as gods. They want to replace God through their technology. What does Hashem want? He wants humans to speak out to the true God, to keep Him in their lives, and to learn to live according to Hashem's wishes. Hashem needs a prophet, a leader – finally at the end of the parsha such a person appears: Avram. The remainder of Sefer Bereishis focuses on Avram (later Avraham) and his family, Hashem's hope to have proper influence in the world.

For most of the last year, Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander has generously provided me every week with amazing Devrei Torah on the parsha. This year, Rabbi Brander is focusing on the weekly Haftorah – insights from the prophets in the period after the Torah (after B'Nai Yisrael enter Canaan, after the death of Moshe).

The Haftorah for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh, which we read this week, is Yishayahu (Isaiah)'s words of consolation after the destruction of Jerusalem. Yishayahu's comforting vision is that Hashem will bring solace to those who grieve for Jerusalem. In the past year, since October 7, our people have faced nonstop burials and shiva from victims of Hamas (and more recently, Hezbollah). Outside Israel, Jews continue to face a flood of anti-Semitic attacks, both verbal and physical, all over the world. Our children face attacks at schools, universities, and on city streets. Yishayahu reminds us that Hashem will care for us when we grieve for the victims of violence among our people. Rabbi Brander urges us to bring this message into our daily lives, and especially into our joyous occasions. When we celebrate a wedding, Bar Mitzvah, or other joyous occasion, we must set aside some time to remember those among our people who are grieving for the loss of members of their families. All Jews are family, and we all have family members in pain for their losses. As we return to "normal life" after Simchat Torah, we should not forget that many of the Jewish families are incomplete because of the evils of our enemies.

My beloved 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 Bereishis, the material before the focus on Avraham, show 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. 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. Hodesh Tov.

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilisa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah,

Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Haftarat Parshat Noach: Lessons from the Prophets in Consolation and Resilience

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2024)

Dedicated to Captain Rabbi Avraham Goldberg zt”l, a loving husband and father, a gifted educator and Rav, a man of great integrity and values, a musician that uplifted the soul, and a person who inspired all who engaged with him. We will continue to live his vision and work to ensure his light continues to shine.

Three thousand years later, what can the prophets still teach us today?

As we start another cycle of Torah readings, we also have an opportunity to revisit the Haftarot – selections from the books of the prophets carefully chosen by our sages to complement each week’s Torah reading. The Talmud (Megilla 14a) notes that although the prophets produced many texts, only those messages relevant for future generations were incorporated into the canonized Tanach (Hebrew Bible). So, as we read these Haftarot, we can reflect on the timeless themes they present, and consider how both the prophets’ messages and the sages’ choices resonate with new meaning in our generation.

Since this Shabbat falls on the first day of the Hebrew month of MarCheshvan, we read along with our weekly portion, Noah, the Haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, which is taken from the closing of the book of Yeshayahu (Isaiah 66:1-24). As we read the prophet’s poignant words of consolation after the destruction of Jerusalem, we cannot help but be reminded of where we were just one year ago. During those horrific days in the aftermath of Oct. 7, the cemeteries worked relentlessly as each and every body was identified, families were notified, and burials arranged nonstop. It was a period of non-stop shiva, with one family after another sitting in mourning – many in temporary lodging, far from the places they call home. Unfortunately, while the rate of the loss has thank God slowed, we still face the painful, ongoing sacrifice of the most heroic amongst our people.

Thus in these times, Yishayahu’s prophecy offers a comforting vision, assuring that God will bring solace to those who grieve for the struggles of Jerusalem. That the sounds of rejoicing will once again fill the streets of Jerusalem. Yet the text points out that only those who empathize with Israel’s hardships will merit this shared joy that will eventually resonate throughout the land. The Talmud (Megilla 30b) underscores this idea through Yishayahu’s words of this week’s haftarah, “rejoice with [Jerusalem] all who mourn for her,” (66:10).

This idea of the need to empathize with and really feel the hardships of the Jewish people is something I find myself reflecting on often today, especially when I travel outside of Israel. Often, I am moved by the extent to which some Diaspora communities embrace the current hardships in Israel, holding events to raise hope for and awareness of the hostages still in Gaza; learning in the merit of fallen soldiers; sending delegations to volunteer. But other times, I find it troubling that on my trips abroad, I meet Jews both observant and unaffiliated who appear to be disconnected from Israel’s current challenges. **For me it is both painful and disturbing to witness the celebration of lifecycle or religious events in which there is no pause, no mention of the sacrifices occurring in Israel. Although these events may include strictly kosher food and Jewish ritual, the atmosphere feels distant from the Jewish spirit.** [emphasis added]

If we have any hope of finding our way towards collective solace, we must first share in one another’s pain, and recognize the grief we have held together for over a year. The weight of this grief remains with families who

continue to move forward with courage, as well as with those who have more recently joined this painful “club” of which no one wants to be a member.]emphasis added[

Whether at funerals, shivas, one-year memorial services for fallen soldiers or those murdered in Israel’s South, I find myself surrounded by heroes who embody the words of the prophets. After 2000 years in diaspora, they truly “*rejoice with Jerusalem*,” are glad for her, and indeed love her – even when the price for that devotion demands the ultimate sacrifice, losing the one you personally love most in the world. I am confident that we are living in the dawn of the Messianic era, though we recognize that the journey is long and that our final redemption comes at the unbearable cost of losing the most

sacred souls amongst us. This paradox defines our situation: we can participate in the jubilation of an independent, prosperous Israel while deeply mourning precious lives, such as our friend, our former student, our rabbi, Avi Goldberg. He is one of the holiest amongst us.

The Haftarah offers us a pathway towards how to ensure that we never lose sight of our shared destiny. The prophet declares that “*Like one whom a mother comforts, so I will comfort you, and in Jerusalem you shall find comfort*”)ibid. 66:13(. This compassionate verse imagines God as a loving parent, speaking in intimate, individual personal consolation. Yet it also speaks in the very same breath of the broader consolation found in the restoration of Jerusalem. It is from this verse that we derive the tradition of the “*Hamakom*” greeting used during shiva visits, comforting mourners not only for their personal loss, but also in solidarity with all who grieve for Zion and Jerusalem. This shows how closely our personal grief is interwoven with our collective story, grounding us in a shared identity and purpose.

In fact, the next verse in the Haftarah —)66:14(: “*You shall see and your heart shall rejoice, Your limbs shall flourish like grass]GOD’s power shall be revealed!*” — was etched into the Western Wall generations ago by a visitor. It, too, stands as a reminder that our hope for consolation is not just individual, but shared. As we grieve together, we also pray that we will one day rejoice together, witnessing a renewal that reaches from each mourning heart to the entire nation. May we see that day soon; a time when Jerusalem’s streets once again resound with joy, and our shared pain transforms into collective strength – and peace.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Blander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Noach: Chapter 11

By Rabbi Label Lam *)5779(

Now the entire earth was of one language and uniform words. And it came to pass when they traveled from the east, that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly”; so the bricks were to them for stones, and the clay was to them for mortar. And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire earth.” And HASHEM descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man had built. And HASHEM said, “Lo!]they are[one people, and they all have one language, and this is what they have commenced to do. Now, will it not be withheld from them, all that they have planned to do? Come, let us descend and confuse their language, so that one will not understand the language of his companion.” And the Lord scattered them from there upon the face of the entire earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore, He named it Babel, for there HASHEM confused the language of the entire earth, and from there the Lord scattered them upon the face of the entire earth.)Breishis 11:-9(

It is no wonder that the story of Tower is found in chapter 11. It's the first corporation to declare bankruptcy. Even though they had a monopoly, it still failed. HASHEM thwarted their project by confusing their languages. How did changing their languages frustrate the building of the tower? Rashi explains, on the verse that says that they did not understand each other: *"This one asked for a brick and the other one brought him mortar and so he stood up and split his head open."*

I was learning this Rashi with a group of beginners, and I shared with them my honest frustration with this Rashi. It sounds almost cartoonish, pardon me. Is that the way it works in our world? I went to a local store right before Shabbos because my wife tells me we need plastic table cloths. The only store that was still open was a Spanish speaking establishment. I asked the fellow if he has plastic table cloths. He leads me to the back of isle 8, and there he shows me shower curtains, saying "plastic" and pointing.

It took a few minutes of charades and pantomime until we came to understand that what I was looking for was not in the store, but at no point did I even think to do violence, as frustrated as I was. Is this the way the world behaves?

Jeffrey gave an unbelievable answer. He reminded us of something we had learned earlier and applied it perfectly. I had told them that I was learning the story of the tower with a very wealthy young businessman, Laurence, who interrupted the lesson with a somewhat irreverent statement. *"Rabbi, I don't like this story!"* I asked him why not and what he told me was fascinating. *"In all the episodes we learned, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noach and his sons, there was human drama, people had names and personalities but not here."* Then I realized how true his words were. *"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name."*

No names! He's right! It was a faceless and nameless society. People did not count. The communal project reigned supreme over the individual. The Midrash affirms this. When a brick fell, they had a week of national mourning, Shiva. After all it took years to create and get it into place. Yet when a human died while building the tower, the proverbial broom swept'm out of the way.

Jeffrey said that according to the way we live, this Rashi doesn't make sense, but matched to the values of that failed society, it makes perfect sense. If the grocer delivers the wrong product, what's the big deal!? He still has inherent value that is infinitely higher than his usefulness to me. However if the person's only value is based on his ability to contribute to the communal project, then he is rendered worthless like a broken clock and tossed into the garbage heap.

I know of a number of successful businesses that were sold by lifetime owners who knew the name and the birthday of every person in the company from the elevator guy and the cleaning lady to the CEO – and when they ended up in the hands of some bean counters, they went belly up. That's the story of chapter 11.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-noach/>

Noach: How Humankind Became Adults: The Challenges of Knowing Good and Evil

by Rabbi Dov Linzer * © 2011

It is just a few hundred years since the world has been created, and everything has gone to pot. When the world was freshly minted and created, we heard the refrain with each act of creation, "And God saw that it was good," and that the world as a whole was "exceedingly good." Now, humans have come and made a mess of everything, and a different refrain is heard: "And God saw that "massive was the evil of man on the earth, and all the thoughts of his heart were only evil the entire day." (Breishit 6:5). How did we get to this stage? How did man bring evil – in his heart and in his actions – to the earth that God had made. Undoubtedly, this is the result of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man now knows evil, and as a result, evil has entered into the world. So God starts again. God wipes out the entire world and preserves only Noach, hoping that this time humans will choose the good. All of this, because of the tree.

What was the knowledge that the tree imparted and how did it introduce evil into the world? There are those that say that the eating from the tree gave humans free choice, gave them the ability to choose between good and evil. But if this is the case, if they did not have this ability prior, how could they have chosen to eat from the tree, and how could they have been held accountable? A more satisfying explanation is the one offered by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and, more

recently, the philosopher Michael Wyschograd. Rav Hirsch explains that the tree did not give them the ability to choose, it gave them the ability to know, that is, to judge. Until they ate from the tree, they only knew of God's definition of right and wrong. They could violate God's commandment, but with the clear knowledge that they were doing something wrong.

We, of course, make choices all the time that we know are wrong. Cheating on our diet, speaking lashon hara, and the like. These bad choices come from weakness of will what Greek philosophy terms *akrasia*. This is the source of much wrongdoing. But it is not the only source. For when humans ate from the tree, they began, for themselves, to determine what is good and what is bad. They gained not moral choice, but moral judgment, an ethical sensibility. Now, not only could they choose to disobey, but they might also decide that what God has determined to be bad is, in their eyes, good. They could do the wrong, thinking that it was good.

The Biblical verses bear out this interpretation. We are told, not only by the snake, but by God as well, that the tree will make the humans "like God." What is it that we know about God so far in the narrative? We know that God creates. We also know that God assesses and makes judgments. "And God saw that it was good." And what do we hear as soon as the woman chooses to eat from the tree, "And the woman saw that it was good...")Breishit 3:6(. The tree has made them like God. Man and woman will from this day forward see, for themselves, whether something is good or evil. They will make their own moral decisions.

And what is wrong with that? According to Hirsch, what is wrong is that the moral decisions of humans will, oftentimes, be incorrect. We are not omniscient. We have our own drives, lusts, and self-interest. What about the tree did the woman see that was good? She saw "that it was good for eating, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and desirous for gaining wisdom." It is good from a self-interested perspective, from a perspective of satisfying desires, but not from a moral perspective. For Hirsch, the problem is that we might decide that something is good, when it is, in fact, bad.

Wyschograd goes one step further. He states that even were we to judge correctly, there is a sin in making the judgment ourselves, in being independent moral agents. If we are to be in a truly faithful relationship with God, then only God should define what is good and what is bad. To judge other than God, even if we choose in the end to obey, is to have left the Garden of Eden, to have left a perfect relationship with God.

Read this way, the narrative of the first two parshiyot of the Torah is one of a fallen humankind. How much better would it have been had we never eaten from the tree, had we not known of good and evil, had we never become independent moral agents! But... really? Is this how we think of our own humanness? Don't we feel that in not having the ability to make moral judgments we are giving up a very central part of what it means to be human, of the value of being human?

Rather than seeing the eating from the tree as a "fall," Nechama Leibowitz)echoing to some degree Immanuel Kant(offers a different explanation of this newfound state. The sin of the first man and woman was inevitable. It was a necessary act of becoming independent, of growing up. Adam and Eve had been living like children – everything was provided, all decisions and rules were made for them, all they had to do was obey the rules. But this is not the life of an adult. And to become independent, to leave the home, inevitably some rebellion, rejection, statement of separateness will have to take place. The sin was an act of individuation, it was what allowed Adam and Eve to become adults, but it forced them to leave home, where everything was perfect and taken care of for them. Now they would have to go it on their own.

And when our children leave home, we want them to think for themselves. We want them to make their own judgments, their own decisions. There is just one thing. We want those decisions to be the same ones we would have made. This will be the challenge for humans from here on in. As independent moral agents, we can make judgments, decisions, that are not as God would have us choose. But the other side of the coin is that as independent moral agents, we bring something important into our relationship with God. We bring our own thoughts, ideas, and judgments. Many of them may be bad and misguided, but some will be good, worthwhile suggestions and contributions.

The first generations after the sin tell the story of how easy it is for this independence to lead us astray. Left totally to our own devices, we will make one wrong decision after another, we will turn "good" into "bad." We continue to see, to judge, but to see wrongly, and to act wrongly. "The sons of elohim saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful; and they took as wives all those whom they chose.")Breishit 6:2(. We have what to contribute, but for this relationship to succeed, we will need more guidance. And thus, when God starts the world all over again, God formalizes our relationship and God

gives us the needed guidance. God makes a covenant, a brit, and God gives commandments. With these clear directives, with a relationship built on brit and mitzvot, it is hoped that humans, if they act like responsible adults, will be able to take a world that is good, and to build it.

This is the complicated and complex reality in which we live as humans in a relationship with God. Even with a covenant, even with commandments, we can continue to see, to judge and to choose wrongly: "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.")Breishit 9:22(. Of course, because we can now think and make decisions for ourselves, it is also possible that we can introduce something new, something that God has not commanded, but that is nevertheless good: "And Noah built an altar to the Lord ... And the Lord smelled the pleasing odor...")Breishit 8:20-21(.

We are adults. We can judge and choose, and we must face the responsibility of doing so wisely, with a commitment to God's covenant and God's mitzvot. And because we are adults, because we are able to think for ourselves, because we are able to innovate and contribute in the moral and religious realm as well, we have the ability not only to preserve the good of the world, but to increase the good within it.

Shabbat Shalom!

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

Note: copied from my archives

Some Considerations on Noah's Drinking

by Rabbi Andrew Kaplan *

It is hard to read this week's Torah portion and not think about the role that wine plays in it. This is largely due not only to the first appearance of wine in the Torah, but also a certain sense of drama going on. So how does this story involving the titular character of this week's Torah portion inform us regarding wine and drinking in the Torah?

When we read of Noah's planting of a vineyard)Gen. 9:20(, it seems to be the immediate focus of his postdiluvian life, as reflected in one third-century rabbi's opinion on Noah's wine timeline)Bereshit Rabbah 36:4(:

Rabbi iyya bar Abba said: "On the same day he planted, he drank, and he was humiliated."

It would seem that Rabbi iyya bar Abba is picking up on the rapidity and terseness of the story's timeline, yet astute readers will know that there are months, if not years, that need to pass before grapevines are ready to yield their fruit, as well as time to harvest the grapes, and then to ferment them. It may be that the Biblical narrative's focus is on explaining where Noah's store of wine came from, rather than the mechanics of wine production. In other words, it would certainly seem strange to a reader of the story that Noah survived a massive flood, yet there happened to be wine available; yet our Torah portion explains that, owing to his agricultural prowess, Noah was able to cultivate a vineyard and create wine with it.

But the final aspect that Rabbi iyya bar Abba puts on our radar is a humiliation of Noah: what is this humiliation? Is it simply that he got drunk and passed out, or is there something more?

While it would seem that Noah got naked while drunk, it may also be that this nakedness is related to his son, Ham. This supposition arises primarily from the curse that Noah levels against Ham after realizing what happened to him. While this matter is an entirely separate topic)for more, see episode #5 of *The Jewish Drinking Show*)29 October 2019(, from the perspective of the narrative, we are left with Noah's planting the vineyard, drinking the wine, getting drunk, and waking up from his drunkenness.

Of course, one matter that is unclear is if this is the first-ever such vineyard (see Ramban on Gen. 9:20), if it's Noah's first action upon disembarking from the ark (see Sforno on Gen. 9:20), or something else, which would point to his motivation. The text is silent as to the causes of Noah's drinking and/or subsequent inebriation, although it may be fair to speculate that it was either to celebrate a sense of completion, or perhaps even to mourn the passing of the world he had known.

Whether borne out of celebration or despair, Noah's drinking yields his passing out, with something happening to him involving his son Ham. Thus, the first recorded Biblical encounter by humanity with wine is a curiously ambiguous story, yielding a variety of possibilities for this first Jewish drinking story. How we consider this story may also shed light on how we consider wine, drinking, and drunkenness in both the Torah, as well as our own lives.

* Rabbi, Cincinnati University Hillel. Author and producer, Jewish Drinking Show podcast. Ordination Yeshivat Chovevei Torah 2009.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/10/noach5785/>

Remembering the Anonymous: Thoughts for Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Dr. Roger Mesznik, a longtime friend and member of our Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, recently gave me two books in which he traced his family's genealogy — with both Sephardic and Ashkenazic roots. In the Prologue to his book on the Mesznik family, he notes that *"in some cases we know more about their deaths than about their lives. History has conspired to leave more records about how and when they died than about who they were, what they dreamed of, and what they were about to become, or aspired to be."*

This profound observation is true of so many human beings who have lived and died, and who left only faint — if any — traces of who they actually were. Indeed, over the past thousands of years, billions of people have died and have sunk into eternal anonymity.

And yet, all of these anonymous ancestors played their roles on the stage of human history. They had families and friends; they worked, played, dreamt, struggled, rejoiced, mourned, hoped. Although we have little trace of who they were, they impacted in some way on the progression of human history.

This week's Torah portion relates the story of Noah, the great flood, the survival of Noah's family, the beginning of a new chapter of humanity. The Torah tells us that Noah took his wife, sons and daughters-in-law onto the ark with him. But it doesn't give us the names of Mrs. Noah, Mrs. Shem, Mrs. Ham or Mrs. Yafeth. These women are left in anonymity. Yet, according to Biblical tradition, these women were the matriarchs of all later humanity, including us! Why don't we know anything about them, even their names?

Tradition attempts to fill in historical vacuums so that the Midrash in Bereishith Rabba refers to Noah's wife as Naamah. In the Dead Sea Scrolls her name is given as Emzara. Other sources have provided her with other names. These sources were uncomfortable leaving Mrs. Noah without a name of her own. Giving a name, even if fictitious, is an attempt to ascribe an identity to an otherwise anonymous individual.

Let us try to imagine something about the life of Noah's wife. Her husband was righteous; he defied the immoral society in which his family lived. He must have been a social outcast, being viewed as a self-righteous trouble maker. He spent years building the ark and must have been subjected to scorn and abuse by the public. Noah obviously had moral strength but he must have been pained and isolated. It was his wife who stood by him and with him, who gave him the courage and confidence to persist. Without her support, Noah may well have failed in his mission. Mrs. Noah was a heroic person who shared the trials of her husband.

By omitting reference to Mrs. Noah's name, perhaps the Torah is thereby imparting a vital lesson. Some of the most important people in history — and in our own times — are people who may be entirely unknown to us. Their behind the scenes sacrifices, courage and faith have helped shape and strengthen the moral fabric of society. Thank you Mrs. Noah!

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since 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](https://www.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 during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3286>

The Tower of Babel Revisited: Thoughts on Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

Yet, a consideration of the text may lead us to an entirely different explanation of the story. The Torah informs us that:

"the whole earth was of one language and of uniform words. It came to pass, as they migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there... And they said one to the other: Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top shall reach to the heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered all over the earth."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Noach – Starting Over

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

The world was like an airplane in a tailspin and losing altitude. Theft was rampant, immorality was normalized, and the Divine decree of annihilation had been issued. Yet there was hope. Noach, the man for whom this week's Parsha is named, was a righteous man. Through him, mankind could hope to see better days.

The Mabul (great flood) came and went. Noach emerged from the Teiva (ark) and found that the world as he knew it had been destroyed. At that moment, the eyes of the entire universe were upon him. Noach was a righteous man with a lot of life experience. What would he do to start over?

The Torah tells us: *"He planted a vineyard."*

The Medrash comments incredulously: Was there nothing else [productive] that Noach could have done?

Indeed, the Torah tells us that from his vineyard Noach got drunk and was disgraced.

Noach was a great man. Yet, at that critical time, when the world needed to start over with a man of his greatness and life experience at the helm, he appears to have been overwhelmed. The utter destruction he now saw with his own eyes left him compromised, and he got drunk. From that point on we do not hear of Noach. He simply fades from the Biblical scene.

The story of the Flood, the story of Noach, is one that starts with hope. We wishfully see Noach as the guide for rebirth, the Zeide wise man who will help the world start over. But the story ends in sadness. Noach is overwhelmed by the task and fails in this mission. In the post Flood era, he lies drunk in his tent, far from the leader who will help humanity start over.

There are so many times in life that people need to start over. Some of these times are part of the natural sequence of maturing. Other times are starting overs that we don't wish on anyone, but sometimes do happen. So, whatever the reason that a person is looking to start over — whether happily as a young couple, disappointed after a job fallout, or in sadness after a divorce, we must look for a role model who can guide us as to how to successfully start over.

I suggest that our father, Yakov, can serve as a guide as to how to start over successfully.

Yakov made many transitions in his life. Despite change, he stayed strong. His personality looms big, even in the company of the Patriarchs. It is Yakov who is able to keep the Jewish family together despite some very intense

differences. Ultimately, Yakov manages to start over in Mitzrayim and create an eternal legacy in the Jewish people.

There are a number of things that Yakov did when he put his best foot forward to start over in Mitzrayim. All of these can serve as guides for anyone who needs to start anew.

Firstly, Yakov tapped into his core values. He instructed Yehuda to go ahead and set up a Yeshiva. Sometimes, fear and crisis can set us off course. We can be dazzled by freedom or bitter from seemingly unfair events that brought us to this place. We must be able to do a reality check and be in touch with our values, our goals and our narrative. Unlike Noach, who in that moment of shock, defines himself as "Ish Hoadoma -- A Farmer," Yakov sees himself as the wise grandfather of the Jewish people, a worthy link in the chain of holiness that started with his grandfather Avraham. Yakov looks to see what challenge awaits on the horizon and strategically embraces it.

The second thing Yakov does is he connects with Yosef. He is aware that Yosef is someone who has done this particular transition before. Yosef has already transitioned into Mitzrayim successfully. With a dazzling balance of independence and integration, Yosef could provide the wisdom of life experience to those who now need to travel a similar journey of transition and pave a path that works for them as they encounter similar situations.

Finally, as Yakov met Yosef to renew their relationship and partner to provide for the Jewish family, Yakov recited Shema. Similarly, anyone experiencing transition with a desire to succeed should reaffirm the core values that we hold dear and express them in prayer.

Transitions can be scary, especially if they are as dramatic as that which Noach experienced, placing him in a situation where he must truly start over. But we can avoid the sad ending of Noach's story. We can connect with our personal values, our narrative, and the best self-definition of ourselves. We can connect with others who have travelled on a similar journey and gain from their wisdom, advice, and encouragement. And we can connect with Hashem in prayer and with clarity of purpose.

In life, there will be transitions that require us to start over. Choosing our role models wisely plays a large part in directing what the outcome will be.

With heartfelt blessings 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 and www.teach613.org; his email is 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 – “gafritis” meaning sulfur, and the wood was named for its sulfuric content. Hashem wanted Noach to use the sulfuric wood to visibly show the people of Noach’s time the judgement they were worthy of for their immoral and destructive ways. In His infinite love and concern for humanity, G-d offered this added warning while Noach was building the Ark, in the hope that this would lead them to change their ways and would save humanity.

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

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

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

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

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

* Rosh Kollel, Savannah Kollel, Congregation B’nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Noach

By Rabbi Herzl Heftner *

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

* Founder and dean of the Har’el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftner is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do,

send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

What Did Ham Do?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Noah, the man of the land, started]rebuilding after the flood[by planting a vineyard. He drank of the wine, became inebriated, and exposed himself naked in his tent. Ham, Canaan's father, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside the tent. Shem and Yepheth took the robe on their shoulders, walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness.]Unlike Ham[they faced backward and therefore did not see their father's nakedness.)Gen 9:20-23(

The Torah could not have been clearer when describing Ham's sin, yet the commentators refused to accept the Torah's words at face value. Maybe they felt that seeing one's father naked does not deserve a mention in the Torah, or maybe because Noah's reaction, an eternal curse cast upon Canaan, Ham's youngest son, would seem exaggerated if Ham only walked in on him:

When Noah woke up from his drunkenness, he knew what his youngest son did to him. He said, cursed be Canaan, let him be a slave of slaves to his brothers. He said, blessed is YHWH, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his slave. May God widen the boundaries of Yepheth and may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be their slave.)Gen. 9:24-27(

So, what did Ham do? Rashi says that he either castrated his father or violated him. The first is a Midrashic commentary, and the second is Rashi's own, based on the assumption that Noah was in the tent with his wife, and that Ham interrupted their actions)Sifte Hakhamim, ibid.(.

Thank God, my elementary school teachers were wise enough not to teach every single Rashi commentary. Not so my middle and high school. We studied and were tested weekly on all Rashi's commentaries, and I was deeply upset by this one)and numerous others, especially in Genesis, which would be more at home in *Canterbury's Tales*(. So, before offering an interpretation, a word of advice to parents: please make sure you know what your children are taught in Hebrew school. Make sure it is age appropriate, and that if it is a Torah commentary, the teacher made an effort to choose one which can benefit the students and did not just blindly follow one commentator.

Now to the text. The Torah went out of its way to say that Ham saw his father naked. That's it. He saw him naked and his brothers did not. The Torah emphasizes that the brothers did not do what Ham did, and the only way to read it is as suggested here, since other readings will render the phrase, and the praise, illogical. Let us replace Ham's undefined act with Rashi's two commentaries:

Ham castrated his father... Shem and Yepheth did not castrate their father...

Ham violated his father... Shem and Yepheth did not violate their father...

See? It does not make sense! What makes sense is that Noah was devastated after the flood. He understood that he was callous and selfish in not caring for humanity. He did not ask for mercy or pardon, and simply built his little lifeboat to survive the flood in his own bubble. Upon emerging from the ark, he was not welcomed by rolling hills and fragrant vegetation but rather by scenes of destruction, death, and decay. The first thing he wanted to do, which became also his lasting legacy, was to get drunk and drown his agony. But you don't just pluck wine off the vine, so for years Noah toiled for no other purpose than produce that jug of wine which will help him forget how selfish he was, and how every person he has ever known is dead. He probably realized that the future of humanity does not lie with blind obedience to God alone, and that it must be paired with deep love and respect towards others. He might have also contemplated the method in

which God saved him from the flood, and understood that God punished him. For not caring enough about others, God made him spend a whole year with eight other humans. A yearlong road trip, with no rest stops or scenic byways.

Into this picture steps Ham. He saw his father rolling on the ground, with little dignity, and he made fun of him. He might have even shouted from within the tent to his brothers outside “*come see the old man – what a disgrace...*” Shem and Yepheth, upset as they were with what their father did, understood his predicament and did not want to further embarrass him, so they took care not to see him at all. When Noah woke up, he realized what had happened, as well as that he miserably failed in educating his youngest son. He was not able to deliver the message of respecting humanity and caring for others. And so, Noah loses it. He wants to blame someone, to curse someone, but he knows it’s his fault and that anyone whom he chooses to curse will be his direct relative. He finally settles on cursing the youngest son of his youngest son, to make the curse as remote from him as possible, but still, he curses himself.

It is a scary story. A story of the failure of humanity, the failure of education, and the failure to show self-control. It serves for us as a cautionary tale, to constantly strive to do good not only towards God, but towards others as well.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

A Transition from Yom Tov to a Regular Shabbat

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

This Shabbat we begin to leave the 5785 holiday season behind and head off into the New Year. I’m sure we are all looking forward to a regular Shabbat with regular Shabbat services and taking out only one Torah scroll. But the joke is on us as this Shabbat happens to fall on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, the beginning of the Jewish month of Cheshvan. So we will be taking out two Torah scrolls, singing Hallel and praying a special Mussaf.

As a great movie character once said, “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.”

But this Shabbat actually affords us an opportunity to celebrate renewal. The moon has always served as a celestial metaphor for the Jewish people, always renewing itself. Even if you think the moon is gone, on Rosh Chodesh it reappears and proves that it never really left.

It’s a message explicit in our parasha as God renews his covenant with humanity after the Great Flood through Noah. It’s quite a message after this year’s Simchat Torah, when we danced with the Torah and remembered those lost in the horrific attacks a year ago.

Yes a Shabbat Rosh Chodesh is exactly what we need after the holidays. To show ourselves that, no matter what, the Jewish people will always renew like God after the flood and also like the moon. What a beautiful way to lead us into the next 11 months as we continue our process of national renewal which we hope and pray will come with safety and security for Israel, and its citizens, and the release of all the hostages held in captivity.

Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah Noah: Permission to Eat Meat

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. Like plant vegetation [which I permitted to Adam], I have now given you everything. ... Only of the blood of your own lives will I demand an account.”)Gen. 9:3,5(

Up until this point, humanity was expected to be vegetarian. But after Noah and his family left the ark, God allowed them to eat everything — except other people. Why was permission to eat animals given at this time?

Temporary Allowance

Given the violence and depravity of the generation of the Flood, it was necessary to make allowances for humanity's moral frailty. If mankind was still struggling with basic moral issues — such as not murdering his fellow human — what point was there in frustrating him with additional prohibitions on less self-evident issues?

After the Flood, God lowered the standards of morality and justice He expected of humanity. We would no longer be culpable for slaughtering animals; we would only be held accountable for harming other human beings. Then our moral sensibilities, which had become cold and insensitive in the confusion of life, could once again warm the heart.

If the prohibition against meat had remained in force, then, when the desire to eat meat became overpowering, there would be little distinction between feasting on man, beast, and fowl. The knife, the axe, the guillotine, and the electric pulse would cut them all down, in order to satiate the gluttonous stomach of “cultured” man. This is the advantage of morality when it is connected to its Divine Source: it knows the proper time for each objective, and on occasion will restrain itself in order to conserve strength for the future.

In the future, this suppressed concern for the rights of animals will be restored. A time of moral perfection will come, when *“No one will teach his neighbor or his brother to know God — for all will know Me, small and great alike”)Jeremiah 31:33(*. In that era of heightened ethical awareness, concern for the welfare of animals will be renewed.

Preparing for the Future

In the interim, the mitzvot of the Torah prepare us for this eventuality.

The Torah alludes to the moral concession involved in eating meat, and places limits on the killing of animals. If *“you desire to eat meat,”* only then may you slaughter and eat)Deut. 12:20(. Why mention the *“desire to eat meat”*? The Torah is hinting: if you are unable to naturally overcome your desire to eat meat, and the time for moral interdiction has not yet arrived — i.e., you still grapple with not harming those even closer to you)fellow human beings(— then you may slaughter and eat animals.

Nonetheless, the Torah limits which animals we are allowed to eat, only permitting those most suitable to human nature. The laws of shechitah)ritual slaughtering(restrict the manner of killing animals to the quickest and most humane. With these laws the Torah impresses upon us that we are dealing with a living creature, not some automaton devoid of life. And after slaughtering, we are commanded to cover the blood, as if to say, *“Cover up the blood! Hide your crime!”*

These restrictions will achieve their effect as they educate the generations over time. The silent protest against animal slaughter will become a deafening outcry, and its path will triumph.

)Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 31-33. Adapted from *Talelei Orot*, ch. 8 (quoted by Nechama Leibovitch, *Iyunim Besefer Bereishit*, pp. 55-56). See also *Otzarot HaRe'iyah* vol II, pp. 88-92(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/TESHUVAH_68.htm

Noach)5769, 5779(– A Drama in Four Acts

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

The parsha of Noach brings to a close the eleven chapters that precede the call to Abraham and the beginning of the special relationship between him and his descendants, and God. During these eleven chapters, the Torah gives prominence to four stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the generation of the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. Each of these stories involves an interaction between God and humanity. Each represents another step in the maturation of humanity. If we trace the course of these stories, we can discover a connection that goes deeper than chronology, a developmental line in the narrative of the evolution of humanity.

The first story is about Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit. Once they have eaten, and discovered shame, God asks them what they have done:

And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Gen. 3:11 –13

Faced with primal failure, the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. Both deny personal responsibility: it wasn't me; it wasn't my fault. This is the birth of what today is called the victim culture.

The second drama is about Cain and Abel. Both bring offerings. Abel's is accepted, Cain's is not – why this is so is not relevant here.]1[In his anger, Cain kills Abel. Again there is an exchange between a human being and God:

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don't know,” he replied. “Am I my brother's keeper?”

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Gen. 49:9-10

Once again the theme is responsibility, but in a different sense. Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, “It wasn't me.” He denies moral responsibility. *“I am not my brother's keeper.”* I am not responsible for his safety. Yes, I did it because I felt like it. Cain has not yet learned the difference between “I can” and “I may.”

The third is the story of Noah. Noah is introduced with great expectations: *“He will comfort us”*)5:29(, says his father

Lamech, giving him his name. This is the one to redeem man's failure, to offer comfort for "the earth which God cursed." Yet though Noah is a righteous man, he is not a hero. Noah does not save humanity. He saves only himself, his family and the animals he takes with him in the ark. The Zohar contrasts him unfavourably with Moses: Moses prayed for his generation, Noah did not. In the end, his failure to take responsibility for others diminishes him as well: in the last scene we see him drunk and exposed in his tent. In the words of the Midrash, "*he profaned himself and became profaned.*"²[One cannot be a sole survivor and still survive. Sauve-qui-peut)"let everyone who can, save himself"(is not a principle of Judaism. We have to do what we can to save others, not just ourselves. Noah failed the test of collective responsibility.

The fourth is the enigmatic story of the Tower of Babel. The sin of its builders is unclear, but is indicated by two key words in the text. The story is framed, beginning and end, with the phrase kol ha'aretz, "*the whole earth*")11:1, 8(. In between, there is a series of similar sounding words: sham)there(, shem)name(, and shamayim)heaven(. The story of Babel is a drama about the two key words of the first sentence of the Torah: "*In the beginning God created heaven)shamayim(and earth)aretz(*")1:1(. Heaven is the domain of God; earth is the domain of man. By attempting to build a tower that would "reach heaven," the builders of Babel were men trying to be like gods.

This story seems to have little to do with responsibility, and to be focusing on a different issue than do the first three. However, not accidentally does the word responsibility suggest response-ability. The Hebrew equivalent, achrayut, comes from the word afer, meaning "an other." Responsibility is always a response to something or someone. In Judaism, it means response to the command of God. **By attempting to reach heaven, the builders of Babel were in effect saying: we are going to take the place of God.** We are not going to respond to His law or respect His boundaries, not going to accept His Otherness. We are going to create an environment where we rule, not Him, where the Other is replaced by Self. Babel is the failure of ontological responsibility – the idea that something beyond us makes a call on us.]emphasis added[

What we see in Genesis 1–11 is an exceptionally tightly constructed four-act drama on the theme of responsibility and moral development, presenting the maturation of humanity, as echoing the maturation of the individual. The first thing we learn as children is that our acts are under our control)personal responsibility(. The next is that not everything we can do, we may do)moral responsibility(. The next stage is the realisation that we have a duty not just to ourselves but to those on whom we have an influence)collective responsibility(. Ultimately we learn that morality is not a mere human convention, but is written into the structure of existence. There is an Author of being, therefore there is an Authority beyond mankind to whom, when acting morally, we respond)ontological responsibility(.]emphasis added[

This is developmental psychology as we have come to know it through the work of Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg and Abraham Maslow. The subtlety and depth of the Torah is remarkable. It was the first, and is still the greatest, text on the human condition and our psychological growth from instinct to conscience, from "dust of the earth" to the morally responsible agent the Torah calls "the image of God."

FOOTNOTES:

]1[For more on Cain and Abel, see the essay "Violence in the Name of God," *Covenant and Conversation: Genesis*, p29.

]2[Bereishit Rabbah 36:3.

Arouind the Shabbat Table:

]1[Why is it important to take personal responsibility for your actions?

]2[Where do you think morality comes from? If God did not give us a moral framework through the Torah, do you think humanity would be able to work it out for themselves?

]3[Noah is compared unfavourably to Abraham who did try and save those condemned)Sodom and Gomorrah(as

opposed to Noah who just obeyed God's command and saved himself and his family by building an ark. Do you think this is fair?

]4[According to Rabbi Sacks, the sin of the Tower of Babel is a denial of ontological responsibility – the denial that there is a God who makes moral demands of us. What do you think the world would look like if most people agreed with the builders of the Tower of Babel? Is that the case in our world today?

]5[Why do you think the first 11 chapters of Genesis tells us these four stories and explores these four kinds of responsibility?

* <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/a-drama-in-four-acts/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

**Is AI the New Tower of Babel?
Can we get it right this time?
By Tzvi Freeman* © Chabad 5785**

The world spoke one language and the same words. When they migrated from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shin'ar, and they settled there.

They said to one another, “*Come, let us mold bricks and fire them.*” The bricks were their stone and the clay served as mortar.

They said, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into the sky. Let us make ourselves a name, in case we will be scattered over the face of the earth.*”

Then G d descended to see the city and the tower that the children of Adam had built.

G d said, “*Here they are a single people, all having one language — and this is what they have begun to do?! Now nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach. Come, let us descend and confuse their language, so that one person will not understand what the other is saying.*”

G d scattered them from that place all over the face of the earth, and they stopped building the city. It was therefore named Babel, because this was the place where G d confused *jb'alal* (the whole world's language). From there G d dispersed them over all the face of the earth.¹

What's so terrible about a construction project uniting the entire world? Not an easy question to answer. As Rabbi Eliezer lamented, the Flood story provides the whole scoop on corruption and violent crime. But with the Tower of Babel, all we're told is that G d didn't like the idea.²

So what was the idea?

Perhaps that's just the problem. Maybe there was no idea.

Consider the background. Humanity had just developed a new technology — artificial stones (a.k.a. bricks) made from mud. People started piling them higher and higher. As often occurs with new technology, they hit the “*unexpected emergent property*” factor: One brick is just a brick. Two bricks aren't much more. But once you get a lot of bricks, if you do it right, you get a structure, such as a house or a tower.

The wow factor hit Babel. They became obsessed with their new invention, building to the sky.

They said, “*We will make a name for ourselves! We will be famous!*”³

Not to provide housing. Not to promote peace and harmony. To become famous.

To paraphrase the great halachist, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, fame is the aspiration of those who see no purpose in life. So too, the builders of Babel’s tower saw no purpose in anything at all. They just wanted to build something big in order to feel big.⁴

And that’s a big problem. Because when you use technology without a purpose, you are no longer its master. You are its slave.

Bricks Versus Human Life

That explains Rabbi Pinchas:

Rabbi Pinchas said: There were no stones in Babel to build the city and the tower. What did they do? They formed bricks, baked them, and built with them until they built it seven kilometers high...

*If a man fell and died, they paid no heed to him, but if a brick fell, they sat down and wept and said: Woe is us! When will we get another brick up there to replace it?*⁵

There you have it: Humankind had invented a new technology, and that technology was reinventing humankind. The tower had rendered the bricklayer’s life disposable, while the brick made from mud just that morning was now worthy of tears.

The Book of Genesis is not a book of stories. It’s a book of prototypes by the Author of all prototypes. So too here: We develop new technology to empower human beings, providing them greater dominion over their environment, greater convenience, and a higher standard of living. Yet, ironically, our obsession with technology often diminishes the value of the individual human lives it is coming to enhance.

Think of the treatment of factory workers from the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Or the rise of the communist and fascist ideologies of the 20th century.

Or the algorithms and AI that increasingly dominate our daily lives today.

Efficiency Versus Diversity

If we can better understand the dynamic behind this negative correspondence of values, we will be better able to reverse it. We could ensure that technology always does its real job and increases the value of life.

So let’s think for a minute: How does this irony come about? We develop technology for our convenience. That’s the mandate we assign it — to empower us. But does technology have a counter-mandate of its own?

In a way, yes. Technology makes a demand on its creators. It demands efficiency. And the greatest hindrance to technological efficiency is this quirky bug that all human beings are different from one another. Our diversity renders us less predictable, creates demands for special instances, and leaves far more room for error.

Like with those bricks. If all humans would be the same, all the bricks they would make would look the same. They would all be placed in the same way, at the same rate. The building would go up so much faster and easier.

Truth be told, we are mostly the same. The genetic difference between any two human beings averages at 0.1% — a lot less than most animals.

But it's that 0.1% that provides us art, music, science, joy, love, drama, meaning, and self-worth. Wipe that out, and no life is sacred. We all become just another number. Less than a brick in the wall.

Freeman Dyson famously called diversity "*the ruling law of the universe*." Technology has the power to take advantage of that diversity and empower the individual. Or wipe it out.

The sages of the Talmud were intensely aware of the value of human diversity and the tendency to sweep it all aside when dealing with large masses of people. They taught:

One who sees multitudes of Israel should say)not "Wow! What a whole lot of people!" But rather...,(, "Blessed are You, G d, our G d, Who is wise about all secrets."

Why this blessing? Because their minds are all different and their faces are all different)and that's what you need to focus on.⁶

But when you build without purpose, only to be famous, or make lots of money, or stay ahead of the competition, then you only see a mass of people out there. And your technology treats them that way.

The Algorithms of Babel

Take your "*customized experience*" of the web and your favorite social media. Truly customizing your individual experience is just too labor-intensive for a machine. Rather, it's easier to modify you and your behaviors to fit the experience of those that fit into your data-type.

The result is a bizarre situation whereby our connectivity polarizes us, breeds depression, and undermines the self-esteem and healthy development of adolescents. That's because we are not the master, not even the customer, but the product. The consumers are the advertisers who want your eyeballs. And the most efficient way for them to get that is to reduce you to a blob.

As one eloquent pundit recently put it:

Spotify thinks lullabies are your jam because for a couple weeks one put your child to sleep... The truth of aggregation, of metadata, is that the "for you" of it all gets its power from modeling everyone who is not, in fact, you. You are typological, a predictable deviation from the mean. The "you" that your devices know is a shadow of where your data-peers have been.⁷

In other words, if you fell off the web-tower, we would mourn the loss of potential data to be farmed.

Now imagine you were the master of your own web experience. Imagine that it was truly customized for your unique talents and concerns. These algorithms could be empowering you to improve your life and attain your goals. They could connect you with others in ways that bring greater understanding and harmony.

We could all be building a new, bigger and better Tower of Babel, but this time with a purpose. This time, G d could say, "*Wow! Look what My creatures have made!*"

But the technology that comes closest to repairing the lost bricks of Babel is the LLM — the large language model.
The Emergent Properties of Babel

How did G d pull the rug out from under the Tower of Babel? Did He steal the bricks? Take away the mud? Shake the earth?

The potential for global collaboration was stymied. And today, it appears that the LLM may have restored that power. None of the above. Because human constructions aren't made of any of these. The mother technology and foundation of all human endeavors is neither the wheel nor the furnace. It is language.

Language is the tool that renders multiple human minds into a single network. It allows for collaboration in ways unimaginable for any other species on the planet. And absolutely everything you use, from the food on your plate to the essay you are now reading, is produced through that collaboration.

When G d "*confused their language, so that one person will not understand the other,*"⁸ the potential for global collaboration was stymied. And today, it appears that the LLM may have restored that power. If we can do it right this time, with purpose and beneficial intent, then, in G d's own words, "*Nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach.*"⁹

To use a tool purposefully, you need to understand what it essentially is, so as not to be seduced by its flash. With LLMs, the flash can be overwhelming.

An LLM, such as Open AI's GPT, or Anthropic's Claude, models the aggregate of all human words digitally available. Originally, the goal was simply to predict what word should come next. How do LLMs make their predictions? By collecting patterns — looking at what usually happens next. And here again, at a very large scale, unexpected properties emerge.

In predicting the next word, LLMs end up modeling the meaning and context of that word. Different contexts, moods, and emotions make for different patterns of words. That's where the wow factor hits for us, with all the oohs and aahs: The LLM ends up modeling not just human thought, but pathos as well. It starts to sound human.

I'm struggling to avoid anthropomorphisms here, and I'm relying on you, the reader, to catch the nuance. I don't want to say that these LLMs "understand" or "get" meaning, context, pathos, etc. I don't see any reason to believe that to be so.

Rather, they model these things, much as a chart or a graph models all sorts of dynamic phenomena in static two-dimensional form. No one would say that a graph depicting currency fluctuations understands what currency is. So too, there's no reason to believe that a social media chatbot actually feels anything for you or understands anything at all.

But it can do something we didn't expect would emerge out of language alone. As far as I know, no one had theorized that you could model intelligence and emotion simply by learning to predict the next word.

So it wows us. Which puts us at risk. We tend to worship things that wow us. Indeed, there are those who already are.

Rewiring Babel

Drop a Talmudic discussion into a free web-app and it spits back an audio workshop elucidating the text. Dump a profound text of kabbalistic theosophy to another free app and you've got a podcast with all the humanlike umms and coughs elucidating its meaning. Hey, Mom! You gotta hear this! Look what I made!

Of course, you made nothing. But the app has certainly done something. It's run a steamroller across this text and flattened it into the landscape.

The bumps and swerves along the path of the Talmud that open avenues for intellectual journeys have been smoothed out as though they were never there. The profundities of the kabbalistic texts have been neatly blended into the platitudes of perennial philosophy's all-enabling "*religions are all one and the same.*"

You could say, *"It's so neat. So cool. So messianic. Let's build it to the sky!"*

Or you could say, *"What am I providing the world that is unique and authentic, that only a human being can provide?"*

There are ways, amazing ways these tools could serve and enlighten humankind. Most, if not all, are collaborative.

We face monumental challenges today in areas of highly complex systems. Specialization has hindered medical care from seeing the holistic human being. Other holistic sciences, such as environmental studies, energy conservation, and urban planning present complexity beyond the pale of our current tools.

In the short period that LLMs have been available, advances have been made in these and other beneficial fields that were inconceivable prior to the advent of the LLM. In each of those instances, these models are being applied with a clearly stated and well-defined purpose. Those implementing them are well aware of why they are using them and of their limitations.

They're not piling bricks one on top of the other and saying, *"Let's see how high this monster can go!"* These are people who are consciously and deliberately contributing to the welfare of humankind. And these are projects that feature an unprecedented degree of collaboration, each individual providing their own unique and valued contributions.

In these projects, what shines through is the realization that we are truly many souls that are one, in a world that is astonishingly one in its multifarious ways, reflecting the absolute, infinite oneness of the Creator.

The dispersion of Babel is paying off. Indeed, perhaps it wasn't a punishment after all.

Perhaps G d truly admired what His creatures were doing. But He said, *"You need to do this right. And to do that, you first need to appreciate the gamut of your diversity, scattered over the planet with many thousands of languages, thousands of cultures, and billions of individual perceptions of life."*

"Then you can come back together and build this tower. So that each one of those unique experiences will shine within it."

It's Up to You

It's easy to say, *"There's nothing I can do about this. I'm just a cog in the wheel."* And it's true that much of technology abuse is the fault of the fiduciary infrastructure that governments have largely ignored, or perhaps helped create.

But a large part is up to the individual. Before you engage any tool, clarify for yourself two questions: What do I want to achieve? And what unique value does this achievement provide to the world?

Most likely, you'll want to get others involved. And you'll discover that today that's become possible in ways never before imagined.

Call it a Moshiach mindset. Because Moshiach is not just a person. It's the notion that this world is worth our investment. That it is essentially good. More than that, it is essentially divine. It's just up to us to reveal that.

The ultimate tikkun of the Tower of Babel will be the Bet Hamikdash — the temple in Jerusalem to be built by Moshiach. It will be a building with purpose. Not for the sake of grandiosity. But to shine divine light in the world, to illuminate each creation with its meaning, and each individual with his or her purpose of being.

In each thing you do, with whatever technology you use, add another stone to that magnificent structure. Now that humanity can be one again, this time ensure it will be a beautiful, diverse oneness.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 11:1-9.
2. Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 38:6
3. Genesis 11:4.
4. Torat Ha'Olah 3:73. See also *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, Noach.
5. Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer 24:6.
6. Brachot 58a.
7. Megan Houser, *AI Is a Hall of Mirrors*, The New Atlantis, Spring 2024.
8. Genesis 11:7.
9. Genesis 11:6.

* Author of *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth* and *Wisdom to Heal the Earth*. This article is part of his series, *Freeman Files*.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6643969/jewish/Is-AI-the-New-Tower-of-Babel.htm

Noach: Shelter From The Storm

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Noach

The second section of the Book of Genesis is named after its central character, Noah (Noach, in Hebrew), and begins with the account of the great Flood that washed the world clean of the depravity and degeneration into which humanity had sunk since the creation of the world.

Shelter From the Storm

Of all living beings, of all flesh, you must bring two of each species into the ark with you; they must be male and female. (Gen. 6:19)

Metaphorically, the Flood represents the distractions that threaten to “drown” our Divine consciousness, and the ark is the safe environment of Torah study and prayer that we construct to rescue ourselves from the world’s distractions. In this sense, each of us is a Noach, whose duty it is to bring anyone and everyone in danger of spiritually “drowning” – ourselves included – into the shelter of our personal, spiritual “ark.”

The doctrine of Divine Providence implies that when G-d arranges for us to know that someone in danger, it is because He wants us to help that person and bring him or her closer to G-dliness.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Good Shabbos, an easy fast, and a happy and sweet new year.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to 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.

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

A Tale of Four Cities

Between the Flood and the call to Abraham, between the universal covenant with Noah and the particular covenant with one people, comes the strange, suggestive story of Babel:

The whole world spoke the same language, the same words. And as the people migrated from the east they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let us make bricks, let us bake them thoroughly." They used bricks for stone and tar for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches the heavens, and make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the earth." Gen. 11:1-4

What I want to explore here is not simply the story of Babel considered in itself, but the larger theme. For what we have here is the second act in a four act drama that is unmistakably one of the connecting threads of Bereishit, the Book of Beginnings. It is a sustained polemic against the city and all that went with it in the ancient world. The city – it seems to say – is not where we find God.

The first act begins with the first two human children. Cain and Abel both bring offerings to God. God accepts Abel's, not Cain's. Cain in anger murders Abel. God confronts him with his guilt: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Cain's punishment was to be a "restless wanderer on the earth." Cain then "went out from the Lord's Presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden." We then read: Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. He [Cain] built a city, naming it Enoch after his son. Gen. 4:17

The first city was founded by the first murderer, the first fratricide. The city was born in blood.

There is an obvious parallel in the story of the founding of Rome by Romulus who killed his brother Remus, but there the parallel ends. The Rome story – of children fathered by one of the gods, left to die by their uncle, and brought up by wolves – is a typical founding myth, a legend told to explain the origins of a particular city, usually involving a hero, bloodshed, and the overturning of an

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

established order. The story of Cain is not as founding myth because the Bible is not interested in Cain's city, nor does it valorise acts of violence. It is the opposite of a founding myth. It is a critique of cities as such. The most important fact about the first city, according to the Bible, is that it was built in defiance of God's will. Cain was sentenced to a life of wandering, but instead he built a town.

The third act, more dramatic because more detailed, is Sodom, the largest or most prominent of the cities of the plain in the Jordan valley. It is there that Lot, Abraham's nephew, makes his home. The first time we are introduced to it, in Genesis 13, is when there is a quarrel between Abraham's herdsmen and those of Lot. Abraham suggests that they separate. Lot sees the affluence of the Jordan plain.

Lot raised his eyes and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan up to Tzoar was well watered. It was like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. Gen. 13:10

So Lot decides to settle there. Immediately we are told that the people of Sodom are "evil, great sinners against the Lord" (Gen. 13:13). Given the choice between affluence and virtue, Lot unwisely chooses affluence.

Five chapters later comes the great scene in which God announces his plan to destroy the city, and Abraham challenges him. Perhaps there are fifty innocent people there, perhaps just ten. How can God destroy the whole city?

"Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" Gen. 18:25

God then agrees that if there are ten innocent people found, He will not destroy the city. In the next chapter, we see two of the three angels that had visited Abraham, arrive at Lot's house in Sodom. Shortly thereafter, a terrible scene plays itself out:

They had not yet gone to bed when all the townsmen, the men of Sodom – young and old, all the people from every quarter – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know them." Gen. 19:4-5

It turns out that there are no innocent men. Three times "all the townsmen," "young and old," "all the people from every quarter" – the

text emphasises that without exception, every man was a would-be perpetrator of the crime.

A cumulative picture is emerging. The people of Sodom do not like strangers. They do not see them as protected by law – nor even by the conventions of hospitality. There is a clear suggestion of sexual depravity and potential violence. There is also the idea of a crowd, a mob. People in a crowd can commit crimes they would not dream of doing on their own. The sheer population density of cities is a moral hazard in and of itself. Crowds drag down more often than they lift up. Hence Abraham's decision to live apart. He wages war on behalf of Sodom (Gen. 14) and prays for its inhabitants, but he will not live there. Not by accident were the patriarchs and matriarchs not city dwellers.

The fourth scene is, of course, Egypt, where Joseph is brought as a slave and serves in Potiphar's house. There, Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce him, and failing, accuses him of a crime he did not commit, for which he is sent to prison. The descriptions of Egypt in Genesis, unlike those in Exodus, do not speak of violence but, as the Joseph story makes pointedly clear, there is sexual license and injustice.

It is in this context that we should understand the story of Babel. It is rooted in a real history, an actual time and place. Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilisation, was known for its city states, one of which was Ur, from which Abraham and his family came, and the greatest of which was indeed Babylon. The Torah accurately describes the technological breakthrough that allowed the cities to be built: bricks hardened by being heated in a kiln.

Likewise the idea of a tower that "reaches to heaven" describes an actual phenomenon, the ziggurat or sacred tower that dominated the skyline of the cities of the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley. The ziggurat was an artificial holy mountain, where the king interceded with the gods. The one at Babylon to which our story refers was one of the greatest, comprising

What Does Judaism Say About ... Podcast
with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is **The Most Important Day of the Jewish Year**

- Next week: God: Is He Really Watching Us?
Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:

Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays

Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

seven stories, over three hundred feet high, and described in many non-Israelite ancient texts as "reaching" or "rivalling" the heavens.

Unlike the other three city stories, the builders of Babel commit no obvious sin. In this instance the Torah is much more subtle. Recall what the builders said: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches the heavens, and make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the earth." Gen. 11:14

There are three elements here that the Torah sees as misguided. One is "that we make a name for ourselves." Names are something we are given. We do not make them for ourselves. There is a suggestion here that in the great city cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, people were actually worshipping a symbolic embodiment of themselves. Emil Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, took the same view. The function of religion, he believed, is to hold the group together, and the objects of worship are collective representations of the group. That is what the Torah sees as a form of idolatry.

The second mistake lay in wanting to make "a tower that reaches to the heavens." One of the basic themes of the creation narrative in Bereishit 1 is the separation of realms. There is a sacred order. There is heaven and there is earth and the two must be kept distinct: "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth He has given to the children of men." Ps. 115:16

The Torah gives its own etymology for the word Babel, which literally meant "the gate of God." The Torah relates it to the Hebrew root b-l-l, meaning "to confuse." In the story, this refers to the confusion of languages that happens as a result of the hubris of the builders. But b-l-l also means "to mix, intermingle," and this is what the Babylonians are deemed guilty of: mixing heaven and earth, that should always be kept separate. B-l-l is the opposite of b-d-l, the key verb of Bereishit 1, meaning "to distinguish, separate, keep distinct and apart."

The third mistake was the builders' desire not to be "scattered over the face of the whole earth." In this they were attempting to frustrate God's command to Adam and later to Noah to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." (Gen. 1:28; Gen. 9:1). This seems to be a generalised opposition to cities as such. There is no need, the Torah seems to be saying, for you to concentrate in urban environments. The patriarchs were shepherds. They moved from place to place. They lived in tents. They spent much of their time alone, far from the noise of the city, where they could be in communion with God.

So we have in Bereishit a tale of four cities: Enoch, Babel, Sodom, and the city of Egypt. This is not a minor theme but a major one. What the Torah is telling us, implicitly, is how and why Abrahamic monotheism was born.

Hunter/gatherer societies were relatively egalitarian. It was only with the birth of agriculture and the division of labour, of trade and trading centres and economic surplus and marked inequalities of wealth, concentrated in cities with their distinctive hierarchies of power, that a whole cluster of phenomena began to appear – not just the benefits of civilisation but the downside also.

This is how polytheism was born, as the heavenly justification of hierarchy on earth. It is how rulers came to be seen as semi-divine – another instance of b-l-l, the blurring of boundaries. It is where what mattered were wealth and power, where human beings were considered in the mass rather than as individuals. It is where whole groups were enslaved to build monumental architecture. Babel, in this respect, is the forerunner of the Egypt of the Pharaohs that we will encounter many chapters and centuries later.

The city is, in short, a dehumanising environment and potentially a place where people worship symbolic representations of themselves.

Tanach is not opposed to cities as such. Their anti-type is Jerusalem, home of the Divine Presence. But that, at this stage of history, lies long in the future.

Perhaps the most relevant distinction for us today is the one made by the sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society). Community is marked by face-to-face relationships in which people know, and accept responsibility for, one another. Society, in Tonnies' analysis, is an impersonal environment where people come together for individual gain, but remain essentially strangers to one another.

In a sense, the Torah project is to sustain Gemeinschaft – strong face-to-face communities – even within cities. For it is only when we relate to one another as persons, as individuals bound together in shared covenant, that we avoid the sins of the city, which are today what they always were: sexual license, the worship of the false gods of wealth and power, the treatment of people as commodities, and the idea that some people are worth more than others.

Likutei Divrei Torah

That is Babel, then and now, and the result is confusion and the fracturing of the human family.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Words Make Worlds – Outreach or In-reach? These are the generations of Noach..." (Genesis 6:9) The story of Noach is framed by two major disasters. The parsha starts with notice of the impending Flood that will destroy the world's population, except for those saved in Noach's ark. It ends with the building of the Tower of Babel, an act that destroys the world's single language. Although the link between these two destructions may not be obvious at first, I think that if we examine Noach's ark on a symbolic level, we can establish the intimate connection between these two milestones of human history.

God commands Noach to build an ark (tevah), yet the Zohar points out that the Hebrew word tevah is primarily to be translated as 'word'. Consider the verse, 'And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence' (Genesis 6:11). Very often acts of violence are preceded by words of violence. The methods of the silent sniper – those distant, aloof characters poised on top of high towers – are the exception and not the norm.

Incarceration for violence – even between husband and wife – can be traced back to verbal insults and verbal abuse. Had the violent language been nipped in the bud, everything may have been different. Therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that if we change our vocabulary and treat language with respect, then we will have a far greater chance of creating a peaceful world around us. This helps us to appreciate how the biblical usage of the term 'tevah' for 'ark-word' offers another perspective on protecting ourselves from violence. In a world where even the animals had violated their innate natures by cohabiting with other species, Noach escapes into an 'ark-word' where God's directions prevail. Noach's word is a very select place where pure animals are taken in groups of seven males with seven females and impure animals can only arrive in pairs. According to the Talmud (Pesachim 3a), the Torah doesn't refer to the latter as 'tamei' (impure), but rather describes them as 'einena tehora' (not pure) (Genesis 7:8), in order to impress upon the reader the importance of purity of speech.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism, complements the literary theme of Noach's Word by examining its measurements: it was 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high (Genesis 6:15). He demonstrates how the actual physical dimensions of the ark reflect the essence of language as the letters representing the numeric value of each of these dimensions are shin (300), nun (50), lamed

(30), which spells the word l-sh-n (or lashon), meaning 'language.'

Taking this symbolism one step further, we can connect the beginning and ending of Noah. When Aristotle called the human being a 'social animal' he was echoing an idea introduced by Targum Onkelos, who translated the final two words of 'Then the Lord God formed the human of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he/she became a living soul (nefesh haya)' (Genesis 2:7) as 'ruah memalelah – a speaking spirit. The term 'social animal' reminds us that if not for the ability of speech, the human being would be an animal on two legs. The ability to communicate, to socialize and to share language with other creatures, defines our humanity. If we were to be deprived of language or the ability to communicate, we would be reduced to the level of animals.

This explains why solitary confinement is such a powerful instrument of torture. One of the great strengths of Natan Sharansky was his ability to survive, and even thrive, through the long years of solitary confinement imposed upon him by the Soviet prison system. Gifted with a power to concentrate, he was able to create an inner world through books, chess games, inner dialogues, and his tiny book of Psalms. His body may have been in solitary confinement, but his inner world of words and ideas allowed him to maintain his dignity as a human being. In a sense, Sharansky is a modern-day Noah, the survivor of the Deluge that ultimately brought Soviet Russia to its knees.

Toward the end of Parashat Noach, we confront another aspect of language where '...the whole earth was of one language and of one speech' (Genesis 11:1), resulting in the building of the Tower of Babel.

The Midrash tells us that in their zeal to build the tower, if a brick would fall from the top of the tower, everyone would mourn, but if a human being would fall, the event would pass unnoticed. Their unity was deceptive for it didn't enable human communication and didn't allow for individual opinions or individual personalities. The process of building the Tower of Babel left no room for the diversity of ideology or discrepancy of thought. A word (tevah) requires at least two letters or two separate characters communing together; the 'single language' of the Tower of Babel precluded discussion or communication between two respected people with differing but respected views who were sharing their individualized uniqueness with each other – the real purpose of communication.

And so, God punished them 'measure for measure' with multiple languages where they

really could not understand each other or conduct even the most minimal conversation. They were destroyed by the very words that they had used – not as a means of sensitive communication but rather as an instrument of materialistic violence.

So far, we have only considered how Noah's tevah-ark-word was a positive development. However, some commentators feel that Noah and his tevah were incomplete expressions of true religiosity. After all, the tevah only saved Noah and his family. The goal should be to produce not only a tevah-word, but rather a Torah-book, in order to save all of humanity! Noah only understood the importance of God's word to save himself and his family from violence and corruption. He did not see beyond his own immediate responsibilities.

The Zohar goes on to maintain that Moses was a repair (tikkun), a necessary and therapeutic improvement, upon Noah. There are at least two interesting similarities between these two personalities: while Noah saves himself in the tevah, Moses is also saved by the tevah (an ark of bulrushes made by his mother and sister) that floats down the Nile; while Moses lived to be 120 years old, Noah, according to the Midrash, spent 120 years building his tevah, enduring sarcastic remarks from cynical onlookers.

But there is one major difference between the two: when God declares His plan to destroy the world and to save only Noah, Noah silently acquiesces to God's plan and constructs the tevah. But after the Israelites worship the golden calf, and the Almighty is ready to destroy the nation and start anew with Moses alone, the prophet of Egypt cries out: 'Erase me from your book...[but save the nation]!' (Exodus 32:32).

The letters of the word 'erase me' (mem, het, nun, yud), the Zohar tells us, can be rearranged to spell out 'the waters of Noah' (mei Noah). In effect, Moses is telling God that he is not like Noah. He cannot countenance his safe journey when humanity is drowning. 'Destroy me, please' said Moses 'but save the people!'

Noach constructs a tevah – a word; Moses transmits a Torah – a book. It is a book which spells out the name of God, a book which will ultimately bring peace and redemption – sensitive communication and concord – to the entire human civilization. Moses is a tikkun for Noah; and the Sefer (book of) Torah is a tikkun for the tevah (word). As the prophets declare, our ultimate vision is for the Book of Torah to emanate from Jerusalem, teaching that 'nation shall not lift sword against nation and humanity shall not learn war anymore' (Isaiah 2:4).

Likutei Divrei Torah

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A New Twist to the Story of the Flood: The Animals Saved Noah!

The pasuk in Parshas Noach says, "For in another seven days 'time I will send rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out all existence that I have made, from upon the face of the ground. And Noah did according to everything that Hashem had commanded him." (Bereshis 7:4-5) All things being equal, our first impression would be to think that the words "And Noah did all that Hashem commanded him" means that he built the Teivah (Ark). However, that is not how Rashi explains it. Rashi interprets "And Noah did what he was commanded" to refer to the fact that Noah came to the Teivah. This is certainly not the simple way of understanding pasuk 5.

The question raised by the Ohr HaChaim is more difficult. The Ohr HaChaim asks on Rashi: We don't need a pasuk to ambiguously allude to the fact that Noah entered the Teivah. The Torah states explicitly that Noah went into the Teivah – first in Bereshis 7:7 "And Noah came with his sons and wife and daughters-in-law with him into the Teivah because of the flood waters" and again a few pesukim later in Bereshis 7:13 "On that very day Noah came with his sons Shem, Cham, and Yefes, and his wife and his three daughters-in-law with them into the Teivah."

Those who comment on Rashi explain that pasuk 7:5 is not teaching us that Noah went into the Teivah. That we learn from pesukim 7 and 13. Rashi is explaining that "And Noah did that which he was commanded" means he came up to the Teivah. So the question becomes, what is the big deal here? It does not seem significant that Noah came up to the door of the Teivah!

The Tolner Rebbe cites a very interesting observation from the Tiferes Shlomo, the Radomske Rebbe. The Medrash says in two places that Avraham asked Noah's son Shem, "How were you able to save yourself from the waters of the flood, from the great wrath that was present in the world at that time?" He paraphrases the Medrash's recording of Shem's response to Avraham. Shem said, "I don't know why we were saved. All I know is that the entire year of the flood, all we did was take care of the animals, night and day."

The Medrash Tanchuma is a little more explicit: "Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, asked Shem: 'What did you do in the Teivah?' Shem responded, 'Those animals that ate at night we were busy feeding at night; those animals that ate during the day, we were busy feeding during the day. 'The entire twelve months, neither Noah nor his sons tasted sleep.'"

The reason Noach was saved was that he had rachmanus (mercy) on the animals. In this merit, he survived the flood. Rachmanus begets rachmanus. This also answers another question. The Talmud teaches (Bava Kama 60a) that when permission is granted to the Angel of Destruction (to destroy), there is no distinction between the righteous and the wicked. So why was Noach and his family saved? The answer is what Shem the son of Noach told Avraham and Eliezer: We were saved for one reason, and one reason only—because we had mercy on the animals.

Based on this, the Tiferes Shlomo answers another question. The Medrash says (as Rashi brings) that in the final analysis the decree was only pronounced upon the Dor Hamabul (Generation of the Flood) for the sin of theft. Certainly, the Dor Hamabul did far worse things than stealing from one another. They engaged in all sorts of sexual perversions. (I can still tell it like it is and call it perversion—even though such labeling is no longer allowed in other segments of society!)

True, theft is not a nice thing. But “and the entire earth was corrupted (by sexual perversions)” (Bereshis 6:11) to the extent that it had a corrupting influence even on the animals—that seems far worse. So when there was promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality, and all types of other sexual perversions throughout society, how is it that the final decree came down because of theft? Why is that the “straw that broke the camel’s back?”

The answer is that had they engaged in all this other terrible activity but they would have been nice to each other and have had mercy on one another, that merit of rachmanus would have saved them. Maybe it would not have saved them entirely, but the Ribono shel Olam would have meted out the punishment slowly, over a long period of time. He would not have wiped out the entire world in a matter of a year. People can do a lot of bad things, but if they behave properly with their fellow men, that goes a long way in protecting them from punishment.

The upshot of all of this is an amazing way of looking at the story in our parsha. Who saved whom in the story of Noach and the Teivah? We thought Noach saved the animals! Noach took the animals with him and saved all living things. However, based on this Medrash, the Tiferes Shlomo says that it was just the opposite! The animals saved Noach! Because he had mercy upon them and mercy begets mercy, therefore Noach was not subject to the rule that “Once the Destroyer is permitted to destroy, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.”

Based on all of this, the Tolner Rebbe says that this is what Rashi is teaching by interpreting “And Noach did that which Hashem commanded” to mean that Noach came up to (rather than into) the Teivah. Why is that significant? It is because the simple act of going up to the Teivah separated Noach from his entire generation. When he walked to the Teivah he was telling the rest of society “I don’t want to have anything to do with you.” By separating himself and preparing the Teivah, Noach accepted the task of preparing to save the world. According to Rashi, the praise that the pasuk gives Noach is: He went up to the Teivah – demonstrating his rachmanus for the future of all birds and wildlife on the planet!

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Covenant of the Rainbow

Noam Hernick

“I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (Bereishit 9:13). In this week’s portion, Parshat Noach, after the floodwaters recede and Noach leaves the ark, God enters into covenant with the earth, designating the rainbow—Brit HaKeshet (the Covenant of the Rainbow)—as its sign. This choice is somewhat baffling and raises significant questions. For now, let us concentrate on one question, which I consider essential and central to understanding the significance of the rainbow as the sign of this covenant.

The rainbow is a natural phenomenon, readily explained by the laws of physics. Yet God deliberately chooses this very symbol to commemorate His promise never to flood the earth again. This choice is striking—we might have expected Him to select something far removed from the ordinary workings of nature. Instead, He uses a natural phenomenon, which occurs passively and quite often, to mark His covenant with the earth. How different this is from the covenant of Brit Bein HaBetarim, when Avraham is told to arrange animals which have been cut in two, so that a pillar of fire can pass actively between the divided parts, signaling the Divine presence!

To begin addressing this question, we will examine two distinct sources that describe God’s manifestation in the world – firstly, identifying their differences and then reconciling between them.

In the Book of Tehillim, David likens God’s revelation to the sun: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield” (Tehillim 84:12). In contrast, Yechezkel, in his prophetic vision, compares God’s appearance to a rainbow: “Like the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the radiance around it. This was the appearance of the semblance of the glory of the Lord” (Yechezkel 1:28).

Likutei Divrei Torah

The Rambam writes in A Guide to the Perplexed, “There is a screen that separates us from God, concealing Him with a cloud, darkness, mist, or other barriers.” (Moreh Nevuchim, Part 3, Chapter 9). According to the Rambam, the cloud symbolizes the sins of Israel, which act as a barrier between us and the light of God.

In keeping with the above, the Talmud (Ketubot 77b) recounts how Rabi Shimon bar Yochai asked Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi whether a rainbow had appeared during his lifetime. Rashi explains that “the rainbow is merely a sign of the covenant that the world will not be destroyed. If there is a perfectly righteous person in the generation, no such sign is needed.”

In other words, when there are righteous individuals, the world can experience God’s presence through the direct light of the sun. However, when the generation is sinful, God’s influence is revealed only through the cloud—a screen of sin—and appears as a rainbow. The continuation of the Covenant of the Rainbow in our portion states: “Whenever I bring clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds” (Bereishit 9:14). This implies that the rainbow [of the covenant] appears specifically in the sky, when clouds gather and cover the earth, distinguishing it from other types of rainbows that may form in waterfalls or in water spray formed by sprinklers.

This verse can also be interpreted in light of the allegory we explored earlier: God’s revelation occurs when the world is steeped in sin. Even as storm clouds darken the skies, hinting at the possibility of a flood, God promises that sunlight will break through the clouds, and His mercy will manifest in the form of the rainbow.

Thus, there is no true contradiction between the descriptions of David and Yechezkel; both portrayals are accurate. The difference lies in the spiritual state of the people of Israel: in times of righteousness, God’s presence is direct and unfiltered, like sunlight; however, in times of sin, it is obscured but still present, revealed through the rainbow amidst the clouds.

Now let us suggest an additional perspective on the natural sight which lies at the heart of the Covenant.

When Noach and his family emerged from the ark, they encountered a devastated world. Confronted by the destruction caused by a generation steeped in violence and corruption, they were deeply shaken. This profound impression became ingrained in their consciousness, forming part of humanity’s collective memory, passed down subconsciously from generation to generation. Since the fear of crossing extreme moral boundaries had become embedded in human nature, God chose to express His covenant through a natural phenomenon, promising that

there would be no further flood. In other words, a flood—an extreme form of punishment—was no longer relevant, as humanity had undergone a fundamental transformation.

In conclusion, we have explored two ways to understand why God marked His promise with a rainbow. According to the Sages, the rainbow represents God's revelation when the generation sins, with the cloud serving as a screen of sin that separates the world from Divine light. Another explanation we examined emphasizes the deep psychological imprint the flood left on Noach's family—a legacy passed down through generations, with the rainbow serving as its Divine expression. [Based on the commentary of the Nachalat Yaakov on Parashat Noach.]

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky Superficial Unity

The events occurring in the parshios that we're reading these weeks are, by their very nature, most seminal events. We are talking about the world and its beginning stage, and therefore every event that is described is really the seed for future events and thus gives us an understanding of the process of history which unfolds in the world.

While we have some understanding of the misdeeds of the dor hamabul and the consequences thereof, we are almost totally in the dark concerning the generation of dor haplaggah, the generation that was dispersed. What exactly their sin was is unclear, as is how exactly the punishment fit their misdeeds. And yet, this episode marks the beginning of the existence of different nations, cultures, and peoples in the world as we know it, and thus warrants understanding.

The Ran (Derashos HaRan, #1) explains at length what exactly the dor haplaggah did wrong and what the consequence was. Surprisingly, he says that they were not punished for any particular sin, rather Hashem acted to ward off possible damage that they may inflict on the world as a whole. These people were wicked and had managed to come together; their attempts at building an enterprise together seemed to be quite successful. Hashem understood that when people come together single-mindedly to accomplish something, they can accomplish almost anything. This is wonderful when righteous people come together but when the partners in the undertaking are wicked, unity turns their evil into something almost invincible. As such, the only way that the world can survive with so many wicked people around is to make sure that the evildoers can never come together and become truly united.

This is reminiscent of a pshat that the Sfas Emes says about the statement in the Haggadah, "that not only one nation tried to destroy us". The literal meaning of this is that many nations have, in fact, tried to destroy us. But the Sfas Emes says that this means that, "they never could unite in their attempt to overcome us", i.e. they could never become "one nation" in their attempts to destroy us.

Throughout our history, almost every time a group, nation, or even an alliance of nations, has tried to annihilate us, there always was a different group that took us in. As we were persecuted in one country, we found refuge in another one.

The Ran then explains that Hashem recognized how difficult it would be if all evildoers could unite, and therefore He made it part and parcel of evil and wickedness that they can never come together. It's not just that Hashem will proactively intervene and not allow it, rather it's that there fundamentally can be no unity when there is no goodness. Therefore, as these wicked people were coming together, engaged in a project that seemingly brought them all together, it exploded in every direction.

There is a logic behind this. When many people are seeking good then the good is "one" because Hashem, the source of all good, is one, and all the various people can therefore unite around it if they so choose. But evil and bad are personal; they are not shared ideals that everyone strives for, rather it is each person with his own cravings, desires, and ambitions that joins with the other to get what he needs and wants. This means that in essence they are never united, rather they are simply working together because it's beneficial for each one. That is not real unity; it simply is a relationship that is pragmatic. Therefore, when slight dissension arises, each one spins off to their own world. And that is what happened with the dor haplaggah.

As I am writing this dvar torah (5784/2023) we are just coming to grips with the terrible danger that Klal Yisroel is facing. An excruciatingly difficult battle seems to be looming.

There are two points that we need to bear in mind in this present situation. One is that as united as they are in their hatred of us, they would be more than eager to kill each other were it not for having a common enemy. This means that despite their purported unity, there is deep internal dissension. Somehow this will iy"H turn to a salvation for us, as the Sfas Emes says, "we are saved because they can never come as one to stand up against us."

But this also means that we need go in the opposite direction. We need to understand that

Likutei Divrei Torah

as different and differing the tribes of Klal Yisroel are, and as much disagreement as there is, somewhere down deep we're all tied to Hashem echad. It is remarkable that at a time in which the fissures and breaks between different groups in Klal Yisroel were so pronounced and publicly displayed, all division almost disappeared overnight with the advent of this terrible danger that we're facing. We believe wholeheartedly that the dangers we're facing did not merely bring about a marriage of convenience between groups within Klal Yisroel that are fundamentally incompatible. Rather we believe that we are one in essence, and the fissures, dissension, and arguments were the temporary phenomena. The world survives because the wicked can never become one united front against good, and because all of those different groups that represent tov at their core can overcome surface cracks and fissures and come together as the 'one' that they really are.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's

Derashot Ledorot

Hello, Cruel World [1973]

For forty days and nights the heavens opened and the rains came. Then, for some one-hundred

and fifty days, the waters rose. The world was engulfed in a cataclysm, and all living things were drowned in their watery graves.

Afterwards, the waters receded, and the earth was turned into a mushy swamp. Finally, as Noah's ark rested on Mount Ararat, he heard the divine command: "God spoke to Noah, saying: Tzei min ha-tevah, Go out of the ark." A careful reading of this passage indicates that apparently Noah was averse to leaving his ark. After all, for several periods of seven days each he had sent out birds to test the quality of the land, and decided that it is better to stay indoors. At the end, he did not leave until he heard a direct order by God to do so. He needed a divine command to eject him from his ark.

Philo, the Midrash, and the Ibn Ezra, among others, all wonder why Noah was so reluctant to leave. After all, I imagine that had I been cooped up with the same people and with all those animals in a floating menagerie for twelve months, I would be extremely anxious to get out and place my feet on earth again. The commentaries offer various answers, but none of them is completely satisfactory.

Let us search for an answer by putting ourselves in Noah's place. That should not be too difficult. Because, in a manner of speaking, we too have almost had a Noah-experience. Mutatis mutandis, we Jews are just emerging from our ark, surveying the terrain, discovering death and destruction in so many families we know, and, even more, becoming suddenly precipitously aware of the flood of

fire that engulfed and almost destroyed our people.

I find several reasons, as a result of this psychological identification with Noah, why he would not want to leave the ark. I discover the elements of fear, despair, weariness at having to start all over again, even feelings of guilt. But, because of lack of time, allow me to concentrate on one special reaction that I suspect Noah had--because I experienced it in our analogous situation.

I believe that Noah was reluctant to leave his ark because of disgust. He must have surveyed the land about him and noticed painfully how this beautiful world had been destroyed, how all the magnificence of nature and the achievements of man had been turned to naught--all because of the irresponsibility, the immorality, the petty thievery of his contemporaries. He must have looked at this deluge--soaked ruin that the earth had become, and shuddered in revulsion at the kind of people who brought this on. He probably thought to himself that it is preferable to remain in the company of honest beasts rather than to walk even amongst the remains of such false humans. Touching earth again made him relive his profound disappointments in his fellow men, and he wished to stay on the ark.

I can sympathize with Noah. Having lived through the past three weeks, who is not disappointed in Homo Sapiens? What Jew would want to embrace this treacherous hypocritical world? The Rabbis speak of the blood brought on because of the sin of those who used to steal pahot mi-shaveh perutah, articles worth less than a penny. And then they speak not only of mabbul shel mayim, the flood of water that engulfed the world in the days of Noah, but also the threat of Mabbul Shel esh, the flood of fire.

We are, all of us, sick and disgusted by the Mabbul shel mayim, the petty thievery that has brought on, if not a flood of water, then a flood of Watergate revelations. They are sickening to all of us.

But far more consequential, far more disastrous, infinitely more evil, is the duplicity in international politics which threatens to bring a mabbul shel esh, a flood of fire onto the world and especially onto the Jewish people. Watergate remains indeed a petty crime when compared with the enormity of the blasphemous collusion that now threatens us with the fire of Soviet missiles 'bombs.'

Consider this: when Israel was first attacked from two sides, during these fateful 24 or 48 hours, and the United States brought in a cease-fire proposal to the Security Council, it could hardly find one other government to go along with it. There were all kinds of

discussions and conversations, and we were told that they could not agree on a cease-fire resolution until "the military situation is clarified." What incredible rot, what transparent hypocrisy! What they meant--and any intelligent 10-year old knew about it--was that they first had to find out who was winning the battle. If the Israelis were winning, they would call an immediate cease-fire in order to limit its victories. If the Egyptians and Syrians were winning, they would let them continue until they finished off Israel. And our great Western allies: France, la belle France! They have become the successors to India and Krishna Menon as the paragons of pious duplicity, of sanctimonious self-righteousness, of moral unctuousness. And France continues to maintain that the Mirages it sends to Libya are not meant for combat. Apparently, they are meant merely for the entertainment of Libya's dictator who likes to play with jet planes. England, that land of civilization and gentlemen, continues to play the same game it always has: when you are out of the government, you are a pro-Israel Zionist, and when you are in the government you are pro-Arab. And it does not matter whether you are Tory or Labor. And those primitive African nations, bribed by oil, who do not have the elementary decency to break relations with Israel and keep quiet, but have to float ads in the NEW YORK TIMES, maintaining that their enmity towards Israel is not because of oil, but because of the issues--and here they repeat the ritualistic inanities about Israel, mimicking the Arabs. And these nations have the unmitigated gall to call themselves "non-aligned!" Greece and Turkey, which have been greased and fattened by United States help, will not allow their great benefactor to come to the help of an embattled small ally.

And Germany-ah Germany! What marvelous progress! Thirty years ago Germans killed and others were passive spectators, surveying the massacre of Jews with glossy eyes, and never raising a voice in protest. Now the Germans have climbed up the moral ladder. Now others are doing the killing, while Germany stands by as the passive spectator refusing to help! When Moses took the Children of Israel out of Egypt to Palestine he pleaded with the leaders of Edom: Naavrah na be'artzekha, permit us to go through your land; we will not harm anything and we will pay for everything. But Edom refused. And so these contemporary descendants of Edom, these modern reincarnations of Esau and all that he stands for, refuse to allow Israel even air-space above their territories! And the United Nations--what an abominable exercise in low comedy! The Security Council has become a forum in which people revile each other in obscene language, in which delegates rush at each other in fist fights, and

Likutei Divrei Torah

open their jackets to bear gun-holsters. International delegates have become armed thugs, and the Security Council is characterized by brawls that would disgrace a self-respecting saloon. A world forum steeped in double-think and obvious anti-Semitism! So there is a tendency for us to clam up, to shut ourselves in, to remain enclosed in our own cocoons, to turn sour on the world. We react with disgust and revulsion. We build ourselves psychological arks, constructed from emotional strands of disgust and revulsion and fear and despair and wariness, and we prefer to remain away, remote from the world.

Yet, the divine command calls out to us tzei min ha-tevah, get out of that ark. What shall we do? The answer is you must reassess your understanding of man. It is quite possible that your disappointment in man was so great because your expectations were too high. You, Noah, must no longer entertain such extravagant notions about man's capacities. You have been too idealistic and too romantic. Note this: God encourages Noah to a more realistic view by telling him that, as it were, God too had a mistaken notion of what man could accomplish. The divine judgment is issued: Yetzer lev haadam ra mi'neurav, I have just "discovered" that the inclination of man's heart is evil from his very infancy. God says: from now on man need no longer be a vegetarian, he may eat meat. I had imagined heretofore that man could rise to a higher level (to the level where he can exist without spilling blood) by himself. Now I see that I must compromise. I must allow this gluttonous, blood-thirsty human to bite into meat and let the blood soil his mouth and his heart, and perhaps in that way allay his blood-lust for his fellow human. But one maintain standard I insist upon: no murder of fellow man.

So, become realistic! Do not expect too much, but keep your minimum ideals alive. For us, that means that we must do away with our old liberal pipe-dream about the capacity of the human community to transcend its Yetzer, its own self-interest at all costs. No more must we turn our eyes heavenward and put on a pious mien when we recite that liberal litany about the UN representing "the family of nations." Family of nations indeed! But there are families and there are families; there are good families and there are Mafia families! And the UN has proved itself to be a Mafia family of Nations! No more must we permit ourselves messianic fervor in speaking of the international community, as if a large collection of individual nation-rogues can merely by virtue of its size, become saintly.

We must recognize that cynicism and deceit and duplicity are part of the game, and we must not expect it to be otherwise. But we must continue to use our ideals realistically. We must continue to insist that man is created in the *tzellem Elokim*, in the image of God, and we must always strive to enhance that image--even if we are the only ones to do so. Because that is our burden, and that is our glory.

So Noah teaches us something about our own condition today. Despair and guilt and disgust all make us turn away from the world and the tasks at hand. It is a justifiable reaction, God forces us too out of our psychological and emotional arks and prods us to reenter the stream of events, in effect to say "hello" to the cruel world, and go about our business wiser if sadder.

These have been traumatic weeks and we shall have to rethink them, reexamine ourselves, indulge in national self-criticism, and ask new questions. But despite our own well-founded reluctance to take on new tasks, we shall have to emerge into the new situations with resolve, vigour, vitality and, above all, a proper combination of realism and idealism.

And like Noah who was commanded to leave the ark and confront the world in all its cruelty, so may we be the recipients of *va-yevarekh Elokim et Noah*, the divine blessing.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash **Rav Meir Shpiegelman - God's Revelation to Noah***

One of the questions arising from the story of the Flood concerns God's revelation to Noah. Before the Flood, God appears to Noah, telling him of the impending disaster and commanding him to build an Ark. After the Flood, God appears to Noah again, blessing him and forging a covenant with him. During the Flood, while Noah is in the Ark, there is no revelation, until the earth dries out. We might initially think that there is simply no need for a revelation before the end of the Flood, but the fact is that even at its conclusion, Noah must determine for himself whether all the water has dried up (by sending first the raven and then the dove) – because God has not told him whether the earth is dry. Why does God hide His face from Noah while water covers the earth?

To explain this, let us consider God's providence over His creations. As we shall see, there is a clear distinction between God's providence over land and His providence over water – and this is the key to understanding why God did not reveal Himself while the whole world was covered with water.

Revelation in water - There are many differences between the descriptions of

Creation in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of *Bereishit*. The Gemara in *Chullin* 27b notes that in Chapter 1, birds are described as being created from the water (*Bereishit* 1:20), while in Chapter 2 they are said to be created from the ground (2:19). Further study of Chapter 2 reveals that the chapter makes no mention of the creation of fish, nor of the sea, nor any water at all.

It seems that this difference between the two chapters is bound up with another difference between them: in Chapter 2, God reveals Himself to Adam, commands him, and creates the woman as a helpmate; in Chapter 1, God does not reveal himself to Adam at all.^[1] It seems that, for whatever reason, God does not reveal Himself where there is water. For this reason, it is not written that God created water. Even prior to Creation, God's spirit "hovers over the face of the water" (1:2), and later, He creates only the heavens and the earth. Clearly, then, the creation of water is separate from the creation of the earth and the heavens.^[2] A similar distinction may be noted in the creation of different types of creatures: the verb "*b-r-a*" (create) is used in Chapter 1 with regard to the heavens and the earth, with regard to Man, and with regard to the creatures that live in water. Again – the creatures of the water occupy a special category, separate from other animals.

There are many indications that the water is a kingdom that is not God's focus. Of course, this does not mean to say that the sea is not part of God's dominion, but it is not a place that "the eyes of the Lord are upon it from the beginning of the year to its end" (*Devarim* 11:12). Just as Eretz Yisrael has a special status in relation to all other countries, so the dry land has a special status in relation to the sea; the sea is further removed from the Divine Presence.

And just as the sea is a place that is devoid of God's revelation, so too, the creatures of the sea are devoid of Divine commands and obligations. At the beginning of the *parasha*, the Torah states that "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth" (*Bereishit* 6:12), and so Noah is commanded to bring into the Ark "of the fowl after their kind, and of the cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind" (6:20). Rashi, commenting on *Bereishit* 7:22 (and on the basis of the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 108a), explains that the fish of the sea did not sin. We might understand this as meaning that the fish of that generation – in contrast to everything else in the world – did not "corrupt their path," but it can also be understood as meaning that fish are *incapable* of corrupting their path, since they are not commanded in any way.

For this reason, the Torah contains no restrictions on how fish are to be eaten. Any

Likutei Divrei Torah

fish that has fins and scales – in other words, a fish that is suited to living in water – may be eaten without *shechita* (ritual slaughter) or any other preparatory act. Likewise, there are no laws of *tum'a* that apply to creatures of the sea. The Rambam rules that "vessels made from the bones or skin of a sea creature are [considered] ritually pure" (*Hilkhot Kelim* 1:3). The Mishna stipulates explicitly that "Everything that is in the sea is ritually pure" (*Kelim* 17:13). The Torah has no explicit laws concerning the sea and there are no special *mitzvot* to be performed with water on its own,^[3] nor do we find restrictions on the use of water. This phenomenon is especially pronounced over the course of the trials and tribulations of Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness. When God gives them manna, He prohibits them from gathering it on Shabbat. When He responds to their longing for meat by having quail fall from the sky, He commands them to take care not to gather a large quantity. But when the people of Israel are thirsty and God brings forth water from the rock, there is no limitation attached; they may drink as much as they wish.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the prophet Yona, in his attempt to flee from God, boards a ship. There, however, in the middle of the sea, God demonstrates His complete mastery of the sea and its creatures: the fish swallows Yona and later spits him out, both at God's command.

As the Mishna says, "Everything that is in the sea is ritually pure." The sea is in fact not connected to holiness, and is thus disconnected – along with the fish that live in it – from the world of purity and impurity, a system of laws that belongs to the realm of the Temple. A person who immerses in the water of a *mikveh* is cut off, for a few moments, from the world of purity and impurity, and emerges in a state of purity that is like a rebirth.

Now we can return to our question. When God decided to punish the entire earth and to wipe out all of existence, He removed His Divine providence – and the entire world was filled with water. Only Noah, inside the dry Ark with his family, continues to exist under God's providence, but even he experiences no Divine revelation during this time. During the Flood, while the entire world is covered with water, there is no Divine revelation to anyone. Only after the earth dries up does God appear to Noah once again.

The Flood and the Splitting of the Sea - The splitting of the Sea of Suf is, to a considerable degree, the inverse of the phenomenon of the Flood: whereas the Flood turned dry land into water, the splitting of the sea turned water into dry land. The two events do share many parallels: in both cases the water drowned sinners, and both involved a disruption of the

regular cycle of day and night. On the other hand, during the Flood, the heavenly luminaries did not give their light – as though God had removed His providence even from that realm – while at the time of the splitting of the sea, the luminaries played a role in the deliverance of *Am Yisrael*: night turned into day for them, and day turned into night for the Egyptians.^[4] The Spitting of the Sea has dual significance: it is the final and complete victory over the Egyptians, and it is also proof that God's dominion extends over the water. We may conclude, then, that God does not extend His direct providence over the water, and where there is water, there is no revelation of the Divine Presence. At the splitting of the sea, when the sea turned into dry land, "a maidservant at the sea saw what [even] Yechezkel ben Buzi did not see in his prophecy" (see Rashi, *Shemot* 15:2). Conversely, during the Flood, when the dry land became a sea, God did not reveal Himself even to the righteous Noach.^[5]

However, there is a change in store. The Gemara tells us there are depths of water beneath the *Beit Ha-mikdash* with the power to inundate the world (*Sukka* 53). And one day, Yechezkel tells us, a stream will emerge from the Holy of Holies and become a sea that revives the Dead Sea (*Yechezkel* 47:1-12). It is specifically from the Temple – God's abode in this world – that a river of living waters is destined to emerge at the end of days, bringing life rather than destruction to the world.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish; edited by Sarah Rudolph)

*This *shiur* covers a number of areas; owing to space limitations, the explanation of some ideas is necessarily brief. Apologies to the reader.

[1] The blessing to Adam in Chapter 1 “–Be fruitful and multiply” – is similar to that given to the animals, and is not indicative of revelation (just as God certainly was not revealed to the animals).

[2] The scope of the *shiur* does not allow for a close reading and discussion of the opening verses of the Torah.

[3] The “*nisuch ha-mayim*” (water-pouring ceremony) performed in the Temple on *Sukkot* is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah.

[4] *Shemot* 14:20; see commentaries there.

[5] In *Sefer Yehoshua*, we are told that the waters of the Jordan River split when the feet of the *kohanim* carrying the *Aron* touched them. Just as God is revealed when the water becomes dry land, so the water becomes dry land at the time of revelation. At the moment when the Ark – symbolizing God's constant watchfulness over *Am Yisrael* – came into contact with the Jordan River, the water immediately parted and became dry land.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Noach
Definition of Tzadik Tamim

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1309 – Dilemma of Day School Rabbi: A Non-Jewish Child in His Class – Can He Teach Him? Good Shabbos!

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 51a) interprets the term tzadik tamim that is used to describe Noach as tamim (perfect) in his ways and tzadik (righteous) in his activities. Rashi interprets the expression “tamim in his ways” as connoting “modest and humble of spirit” and the expression “tzadik in his activities” as connoting “without chumus” (violence/theft). We see from this Rashi that the yardstick for proclaiming a person to be a tzadik is his level of honesty regarding dinei mamonos (monetary matters). In a similar vein, the Rambam writes (Hilchos Sechirus 13:7) that a worker needs to serve his employer with all his strength (b'chol kocho). A worker must strive to do an honest day's work for the pay of that day. As proof for this halacha, the Rambam cites “For the tzadik Yaakov stated (to his wives) ‘for with all my strength, I served your father.’” We are familiar with the description of how hard Yaakov worked and how faithful he was when he worked for Lavan: “...By day, scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes...” (Bereshis 31:40)

It is noteworthy in this citation from the Mishna Torah that the Rambam does something quite rare: He refers to Yaakov as a tzadik. Yosef is widely referred to as “Yosef Hatzadik”. I did a word search to see where else the Rambam uses the word hatzadik. The Rambam uses it by Yosef Hatzadik. The Rambam also uses it several times in reference to Shimon Hatzadik (the Kohen Gadol and head of the Sanhedrin during the Second Bais Hamikdash). Other than these reference to Yosef Hatzadik and Shimon Hatzadik, this reference to Yaakov Hatzadik is the only other time in all of Mishna Torah that a personality in Tanach or Jewish History merits this title. Apparently, the Rambam's intention is (like we saw in Rashi above) that Yaakov was called a tzadik because of his outstanding honesty in monetary matters.

The Kav Hayashar (Rav Tzvi Hirsch Kaidanover (1648-1712); Frankfurt) makes this point even more explicitly and dramatically. He writes: “Remember this rule: A person who does not wish to get benefit (even legitimately) from his friend's money, and certainly a person who goes out of his way to avoid misappropriation of money or theft, and whose business transactions are faithful – is certainly a righteous person and a man of integrity, because the essence of fear (of G-d) and tzidkus relates to money, and someone who is careful about dinei mamonos is a tzaddik gamur (completely righteous person).”

Thus, according to the Kav Hayashar, a tzadik gamur is not defined as someone who davens a long Shemoneh Esrei or someone who refrains from speaking Lashon Harah. Of course, those are very important things. But according to the Kav Hayashar, there is ONE measure of a tzadik gamur and that is a person who maintains his righteousness regarding dinei mamonos.

These statements carry a lot of weight in our day and age.

Cross-Generational Praise:

The parsha says that Noach was perfect and righteous (tzadik tamim) in his generations (plural). The Meshech Chochmah infers that Noach exhibited these two attributes: tzadik and tamim. Tzadik, as we said, meant that he was careful to avoid theft. In the generation prior to the flood (which was full of theft), Noach was distinguished as a tzadik because he did not engage in theft like the rest of humanity. Tamim indicated that he was humble and of lowly spirit. Imagine: Noach walks out of the teivah. He and his family are the only people in the world and it is now up to him to populate the entire world. Out of the entire universe, only Noach was saved by the Ribono shel Olam. How does such a person feel about himself? “I must be someone very special.” Nonetheless,

Noach was humble and of lowly spirit. This means that in the generation subsequent to the flood, he was still a tamim, he was still humble. This is the meaning of “in his generations.” In the generation prior to the flood, he was a tzadik in his monetary conduct and in the generation subsequent to the flood, he was a tamim, meaning he was humble and lowly of spirit. Noach was perfect and righteous in both generations.

Their Decree Was Sealed Over Theft of Less Than a Perutah

The Torah says, “Now the earth had become corrupt before G-d; and the earth had become filled with robbery. And G-d saw the earth, and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. G-d said to Noach, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth.’” (Bereshis 6:11-13)

Besides robbery, the generation of the flood was guilty of many other things as well. They were guilty of idolatry and sexual immorality. However, despite all of that, Rashi writes that their decree was only sealed by virtue of their “chumus” (robbery). They were terribly corrupt and immoral in many ways and yet the straw that broke the camel's back was their “chumus”.

The Talmud Yerushalmi asks: What is the definition of “chumus” and what is the definition of “gezel”? The Gemara answers that “gezel” involves theft of money worth at least a perutah and “chumus” involves theft of less than a perutah in value. This is amazing. “Chumus” does not mean robbing a bank. “Chumus” means stealing something that may be worth no more than a fraction of a cent! This exacerbates our question. For illicit relations, the decree was not sealed. For adultery, idolatry, and all types of gross immorality, the decree was not sealed. But “chumus” – meaning even less than a perutah's worth of theft – broke the camel's back! What does this mean?

I saw an interesting insight in Rabbi Avrohom Buxbaum's new sefer on Chumash: The lesson is that when a person steals a single pea or a single needle or something worth less than a perutah, he is abusing the legal system because he knows that he can get away with it. If you know you can “get away with it,” you are doomed!

When a person commits adultery, he knows that he is doing something wrong. When a person worships idols, he also knows that he is doing something wrong. There is a sense of guilt. When a person feels guilty, he is close to repentance. Eventually, his conscience will bother him and he will come to the realization that he needs to stop what he has been doing because it is sinful.

When the generation of the flood committed these major aveiros, the Ribono shel Olam was willing to have mercy and wait, in the hope that eventually they would do teshuvah. But when a person does something wrong and he says, “There is nothing wrong with this,” then he is distant from teshuvah. When he is distant from teshuvah, he will never repent. That is why the final decree of the generation of the flood was only sealed over the sin of “chumus”. The Almighty realized that they would never repent for this. When a person tries to abuse the system and “get away with murder” (or whatever it may be), even though technically it may be legal, he knows he is “gaming the system” and he feels that he never did anything wrong. If I feel that I never did anything wrong, I will never feel remorse and I will never do teshuvah.

Individual and Collective Responsibility

Noach

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I once had the opportunity to ask the Catholic writer Paul Johnson what had struck him most about Judaism, during the long period he spent researching it for his masterly *A History of the Jews*? He replied in roughly these words: “There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasised the individual – like the secular West today. And there have been others that placed weight on the collective – communist Russia or China, for example.”

Judaism, he continued, was the most successful example he knew of that managed the delicate balance between both – giving equal weight to individual and collective responsibility. Judaism was a religion of strong individuals and strong communities. This, he said, was very rare and difficult, and constituted one of our greatest achievements.

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

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

Babel by contrast seems almost idyllic. "The entire earth had one language and a common speech" (Gen. 11:1). The builders are bent on construction, not destruction. It is far from clear what their sin was. Yet from the Torah's point of view Babel represents another serious wrong turn, because God scatters all the builders, and immediately thereafter He summons Abraham to begin an entirely new chapter in the religious story of humankind. There is no Flood – God had, in any case, sworn that He would never again punish humanity in such a way. As He said:

"Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have just done."

Gen 8:21

But it is clear that after Babel, God comes to the conclusion that there must be another and different way for humans to live.

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

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

It was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), the thinker who laid the foundations of modern politics in his classic Leviathan (1651), who – without referring to the Flood – gave it its best interpretation. Before there were political institutions, said Hobbes, human beings were in a "state of nature". They were individuals, packs, bands. Lacking a stable ruler, an effective

government and enforceable laws, people would be in a state of permanent and violent chaos – "a war of every man against every man" – as they competed for scarce resources. There would be "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Such situations exist today in a whole series of failed or failing states. That is precisely the Torah's description of life before the Flood. When there is no rule of law to constrain individuals, the world is filled with violence.

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

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

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

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

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

So the Flood and the Tower of Babel, though polar opposites, are linked, and the entire Parsha of Noach is a brilliant study in the human condition. There are individualistic cultures and there are collectivist ones, and both

fail, the former because they lead to anarchy and violence, the latter because they lead to oppression and tyranny.

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

**Parshat Noach: Words Make Worlds – Outreach or In-reach?
Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone**

"These are the generations of Noach..." (Genesis 6:9)

The story of Noach is framed by two major disasters. The parsha starts with notice of the impending Flood that will destroy the world's population, except for those saved in Noach's ark. It ends with the building of the Tower of Babel, an act that destroys the world's single language. Although the link between these two destructions may not be obvious at first, I think that if we examine Noach's ark on a symbolic level, we can establish the intimate connection between these two milestones of human history.

God commands Noach to build an ark (tevah), yet the Zohar points out that the Hebrew word tevah is primarily to be translated as 'word'. Consider the verse, 'And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence' (Genesis 6:11). Very often acts of violence are preceded by words of violence. The methods of the silent sniper – those distant, aloof characters poised on top of high towers – are the exception and not the norm. Incarceration for violence – even between husband and wife – can be traced back to verbal insults and verbal abuse. Had the violent language been nipped in the bud, everything may have been different. Therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that if we change our vocabulary and treat language with respect, then we will have a far greater chance of creating a peaceful world around us. This helps us to appreciate how the biblical usage of the term 'tevah' for 'ark-word' offers another perspective on protecting ourselves from violence. In a world where even the animals had violated their innate natures by cohabiting with other species, Noach escapes into an 'ark-word' where God's directions prevail. Noach's word is a very select place where pure animals are taken in groups of seven males with seven females and impure animals can only arrive in pairs. According to the Talmud (Pesachim 3a), the Torah doesn't refer to the latter as 'tamei' (impure), but rather describes them as 'einena tehora' (not pure) (Genesis 7:8), in order to impress upon the reader the importance of purity of speech.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism, complements the literary theme of Noach's Word by examining its measurements: it was 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high (Genesis 6:15). He demonstrates how the actual physical dimensions of the ark reflect the essence of language as the letters representing the numeric value of each of these dimensions are shin (300), nun (50), lamed (30), which spells the word l-sh-n (or lashon), meaning 'language'.

Taking this symbolism one step further, we can connect the beginning and ending of Noach. When Aristotle called the human being a 'social animal' he was echoing an idea introduced by Targum Onkelos, who translated the final two words of 'Then the Lord God formed the human of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he/she became a living soul (nefesh haya)' (Genesis 2:7) as 'ruah memalelah' – a speaking spirit. The term 'social animal' reminds us that if not for the ability of speech, the human being would be an animal on two legs. The ability to communicate, to socialize and to share language with other

creatures, defines our humanity. If we were to be deprived of language or the ability to communicate, we would be reduced to the level of animals.

This explains why solitary confinement is such a powerful instrument of torture. One of the great strengths of Natan Sharansky was his ability to survive, and even thrive, through the long years of solitary confinement imposed upon him by the Soviet prison system. Gifted with a power to concentrate, he was able to create an inner world through books, chess games, inner dialogues, and his tiny book of Psalms. His body may have been in solitary confinement, but his inner world of words and ideas allowed him to maintain his dignity as a human being. In a sense, Sharansky is a modern-day Noach, the survivor of the Deluge that ultimately brought Soviet Russia to its knees.

Toward the end of Parashat Noach, we confront another aspect of language where '...the whole earth was of one language and of one speech' (Genesis 11:1), resulting in the building of the Tower of Babel.

The Midrash tells us that in their zeal to build the tower, if a brick would fall from the top of the tower, everyone would mourn, but if a human being would fall, the event would pass unnoticed. Their unity was deceptive for it didn't enable human communication and didn't allow for individual opinions or individual personalities. The process of building the Tower of Babel left no room for the diversity of ideology or discrepancy of thought. A word (tevah) requires at least two letters or two separate characters communing together; the 'single language' of the Tower of Babel precluded discussion or communication between two respected people with differing but respected views who were sharing their individualized uniqueness with each other – the real purpose of communication.

And so, God punished them 'measure for measure' with multiple languages where they really could not understand each other or conduct even the most minimal conversation. They were destroyed by the very words that they had used – not as a means of sensitive communication but rather as an instrument of materialistic violence.

So far, we have only considered how Noach's tevah-ark-word was a positive development. However, some commentators feel that Noach and his tevah were incomplete expressions of true religiosity. After all, the tevah only saved Noach and his family. The goal should be to produce not only a tevah-word, but rather a Torah-book, in order to save all of humanity! Noach only understood the importance of God's word to save himself and his family from violence and corruption. He did not see beyond his own immediate responsibilities.

The Zohar goes on to maintain that Moses was a repair (tikkun), a necessary and therapeutic improvement, upon Noach. There are at least two interesting similarities between these two personalities: while Noach saves himself in the tevah, Moses is also saved by the tevah (an ark of bulrushes made by his mother and sister) that floats down the Nile; while Moses lived to be 120 years old, Noach, according to the Midrash, spent 120 years building his tevah, enduring sarcastic remarks from cynical onlookers.

But there is one major difference between the two: when God declares His plan to destroy the world and to save only Noach, Noach silently acquiesces to God's plan and constructs the tevah. But after the Israelites worship the golden calf, and the Almighty is ready to destroy the nation and start anew with Moses alone, the prophet of Egypt cries out: 'Erase me from your book...[but save the nation]!' (Exodus 32:32).

The letters of the word 'erase me' (mem, het, nun, yud), the Zohar tells us, can be rearranged to spell out 'the waters of Noach' (mei Noach). In effect, Moses is telling God that he is not like Noach. He cannot

countenance his safe journey when humanity is drowning. ‘Destroy me, please’ said Moses ‘but save the people!’

Noach constructs a tevah – a word; Moses transmits a Torah – a book. It is a book which spells out the name of God, a book which will ultimately bring peace and redemption – sensitive communication and concord – to the entire human civilization. Moses is a tikkun for Noach; and the Sefer (book of) Torah is a tikkun for the tevah (word). As the prophets declare, our ultimate vision is for the Book of Torah to emanate from Jerusalem, teaching that ‘nation shall not lift sword against nation and humanity shall not learn war anymore’ (Isaiah 2:4).

Shabbat Shalom

Perceptions By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Noach
Comforting

RASHI LAST WEEK brought a disagreement about the basis of Noach’s name:

He named him Noach, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands from the ground, which God has cursed.” (Bereishis 5:29)

This one will give us rest—yenachameinu. He will give us rest from the toil of our hands. Before Noach came they did not have plowshares, and he made [these] for them. Also, the land was producing thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat because of the curse of the first man, but in Noach’s time, it [the curse] subsided. This is the meaning of yenachameinu. If you do not explain it that way, but from the root nacheim—comfort, the sense of the word does not fit the name [Noach], and you would have to call him Menachem instead. (Rashi)

In other words, Rashi is saying, if we explain the word according to its apparent meaning, “this one will console us,” Noach should have been named Menachem, which means consoler, instead. Since he was called Noach we have to assume that his father saw Noach has a kind of savior of the generation, at least far as working the land was concerned.

But is there really that much a difference between the two ideas? Either way, Noach comforted his generation, so why all the words to tell them apart? What deeper message, if any, is there emanating out from within this seemingly mundane explanation of a seemingly mundane Biblical name?

ת"ב

Well, for one, if you hold up the name Noach (Ches-Nun) to a mirror you see chayn (Nun-Ches). That’s what Noach found in the eyes of God to be saved from world-wide destruction. That doesn’t work with the name Menachem. Not good enough? Okay, then let’s go deeper.

Comforting others who are going through a difficult time is a great mitzvah, which is why we have halachos like sitting shivah after a death. But those doing the comforting can often turn it on when they have to, and turn it off when they are done. It’s kind of like a performance, even if sincere. It doesn’t mean we do not care about the person or their suffering, just that we were not that personally affected by their pain beyond while in their presence.

But do something to make the lives of others easier? That goes way beyond just the time we spend together with others who are struggling. It usually means that, we are involved in their situation before we are together with them, and remain with it even after we have left them. It means that we don’t only take responsibility for how they feel at the moment, but for how they will feel the rest of their life.

Had Noach only been Menachem, someone who only comforts others in their times of need, he might not have found the necessary chayn to be saved from strict Divine justice, and the destructive flood it brought on mankind. It’s because he did things that bettered the lives of others that

he caught God’s attention, and mercy, and survived to talk about it with the post-apocalyptic world.

This may also be why the word zeh in last week’s parsha introducing Noach gets such attention with its extra cantillation note. The same word, in the song at the sea, means this:

Zeh—this is my God. He revealed Himself in His glory to them, and they pointed at Him with their finger (indicated by zeh). By the sea, [even] a maid servant perceived what [the future] prophets would not perceive. (Rashi, Shemos 15:2)

How did Noach, living in such a selfish world, know to be more concerned about others than himself? Because he perceived God in the world, and chose to emulate Him. It takes quite the tzaddik to remain a tzaddik in a dog-eat-dog, look-out-for-number-one type of society. But as the Torah testifies in this week’s parsha, Noach was a tzaddik in his generation...despite all the forces working against him.

The Gemora says that both Rabbah and Abaye descended from the house of Eli, whose descendants were cursed with short lives (Rosh Hashanah 18a). Rabbah focused primarily on Torah learning, and became a famous talmid chacham until this day, even though he died at age 40. Abaye however also emphasized gemilus chassadim, acts of lovingkindness, and merited to live until 60 years of age.

There is probably more to the story than the Gemora is sharing, but its main point is, look how powerful caring for and taking care of others is! There is nothing more valuable to God than His Torah, and learning it is, seemingly, the most important thing we do as Jews.

But it is one thing to go through Torah, and something very different for Torah to go through you. We learn Torah to learn more about God. We learn more about God to become more like Him, and He is always doing acts of lovingkindness. We were created in the image of God. When we take care of others, we live in His image.

Parashat Noach by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Drafting of Haredim

On the face of it, the issue of drafting hardcore Haredim is complex and controversial. When in reality it’s a one “main-shock” issue that began 130 years ago with the beginning of political Zionism, that has over the years produced secondary after-shocks.

“Bereishiet” (to begin with), I must clarify that “Haredim” do not stem from a one-cloth fabric. There are many haredim who willingly and proudly serve in Tzahal, including selected units such as the paratroopers, commandos, Golani, Givati, etc. There are Haredim who are buried in military cemeteries and others who will bear the scars of their loyalty and sacrifices as long as they live.

Then there are the anti-military Chassidic and “Lithuanian” rabbinic leaders who put forward their narrative to sever all connection with Tzahal based on three reasons:

1- Torah study is the life insurance policy of the Medina. A full-time occupation where the individuals involved are dedicated solely to this spiritual umbilical cord connected on one side to the upper strata of sanctity and the other to the ongoing struggles of Am Yisrael’s survival. According to this narrative, the contribution of a full-time Torah learner to the goal of victory is not less than that of a fighter pilot of a F-35 when dropping a 2-ton bomb on Hezbollah headquarters in Beirut.

2- The draft exemption is necessary to preserve the Haredi way of life, and that it benefits Israeli society as a whole by providing a source of religious scholarship and tradition.

3- The religious level of a Haredi young man will be compromised when interacting with non-observant soldiers, especially women soldiers.

As stated above, however the veracity of these claims, they are not the core reason for escaping the draft which is hidden away in a never to be disclosed ideological safe.

As with all serious matters in life we can find the roots of this controversy within the wells of wisdom of Chazal, as stated in the Gemara:

The Gemara (Pesachim 56a) describes the last hours of Ya'akov's physical existence in this world, when he gathered his 12 sons to reveal to them what lies in store for the Jewish nation at the "end of days". However, at the precise moment when their hearts and minds were at their peak attentiveness, HaShem withdrew His Shechina (Divine spirit) from Ya'akov and the revelations became obscured.

Ya'akov voiced his fear to his sons that HaShem's withdrawal of the holy spirit might be due to one or more of his sons being a heretic. For just as his grandfather Avraham had begot the sinful Yishmael and his own father Yitzchak begot the evil Esav, he too might be cursed with a wayward son. Upon hearing this the brothers turned to their father and in unison recited:

שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד

"Hearken Yisrael (our father), the Lord is our God, the Lord is One"

Ya'akov then replied:

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ונעד

"Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever"

Question: How could the single statement "Shema Yisrael" diffuse Ya'akov's deep seated suspicion of heresy? Why did Ya'akov not consider the possibility that the "heretical son or sons" (if there was one or more) was lying?

I suggest:

The brothers waited impatiently to hear of the future geula. When Ya'akov realized that HaShem did not want the details to be disclosed, he turned to his sons with suspicion that they might be the cause. At that moment, HaShem placed His holy Shechina on the brothers and they announced the Shema in unison.

Ya'akov was stunned, because this statement was the essence of the prophecy that he had intended to reveal to his sons. Instead, it was taken from him and given to them.

The prophecy states that just as the "Shema" consists of three phrases:

- 1) Shema Yisrael — Hearken Yisrael
- 2) HaShem Elokeinu — the Lord is our God
- 3) HaShem Echad — the Lord is One

So too will the redemption of the Jewish people evolve in three stages:

1) In the initial phrase of "Shema Yisrael", the name of Am Yisrael is mentioned but HaShem's name is omitted.

This refers to the first stage of redemption with the in-gathering of Bnei Yisrael from the far corners of the globe to Eretz Yisrael. They will return for a variety of reasons but not necessarily religious ones. Most will come to escape anti-Semitism, or totalitarian regimes, or to build a state based on secular socialist Zionism. That is why the name of HaShem is excluded in the initial phrase of the Shema and the initial phase of redemption.

2) Phase two "HaShem Elokeinu" includes two names of HaShem: the ineffable (unutterable) YH... representing HaShem's quality of

compassion, and the name "Elokeinu" representing HaShem's quality of harsh justice.

This second stage of redemption will be characterized by a bitter conflict between Torah leaders as to how to view the Medina. Religious-Zionist rabbanim will see the Medina as the expression of HaShem's quality of compassion for His people Yisrael. The Medina is HaShem's declaration that the Shoah was the last major test in the 2000-year period of anger and galut (exile), and the beginning of a new period of our renaissance leading to the fulfillment of all our prophets' visions.

Millions of Jews have already returned, our sovereignty over Yerushalayim and the Temple Mount and the extraordinary military victories are undeniable signs that the geula is at hand.

In contrast, other Torah scholars will claim that the period of "Elokeinu" – harsh judgment – is still in effect, with the Medina just a stage in the natural development of political societies or a temporary retreat from anti-Semitism. The Medina has no connection to the future redemption of our people still in galut.

3) Phase three "HaShem Echad", is when HaShem's quality of compassion will reign alone, and all rabbinic leaders will unite in the reality that the Medina is HaShem's avenue for the advent of Mashiach and our final redemption.

Yaakov, upon hearing the revelations voiced by his sons, added a fourth stage: "Baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed" – blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever – signaling the universal acceptance of HaShem's total mastery as Creator and Preserver of all things.

Today, with a near majority of the world's halachic Jews in the Land, we are in the midst of the second stage of HaShem Elokeinu where most of the Haredi rabbinic leadership do not hear the footsteps of the Mashiach in Medinat Yisrael.

The third stage of total unity will come about when we witness the miraculous demise of our enemies, as stated at the end of the first chapter of Tractate Berachot, that we will witness miracles far surpassing those of the exodus from Egypt.

We are not far from a religious awakening among the people of Eretz Yisrael, unparalleled since the time of Ezra Ha'Sofer. HaShem will "shine His countenance" upon all those who are here to receive it.

May HaShem grant our gallant soldiers victory over the forces of evil, for the final redemption of our people will come about in the merit of the mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice) of His loyal children residing in Eretz Yisrael.

This negation of the belief that the semi-secular Medina can be a part of the redemption process is the underlying reason for the Haredi leaders' efforts to reject the drafting of their young people. They are willing to sacrifice for a Medina based on Torah, but not for a secular political state.

But the leaders will not admit this openly, so they substitute other reasons to reject army service:

- 1- Torah study is the life insurance policy of the Medina.
- 2- The preservation of the Haredi way of life benefits Israeli society.
- 3- The religious level of a Haredi young man will be compromised.

The three stages of redemption were revealed to Ya'akov and his sons thousands of years ago.

The pivotal question regarding the essence of Medinat Yisrael as the basic stage of the Jewish nation's redemption is the dividing factor between those who say Hallel with a bracha on Yom Ha'atzmaut and who leave their wives and children, parents and comfort in order to face the cut-throats of Hamas and Hezbollah, and those who do not.

HaShem doesn't need great numbers of troops to bring about a miraculous victory. But we who make up the chosen people of HaShem are now being put to the test to see who will take part in the grand master plan of the restoration of the glory of HaShem and His nation in Eretz Yisrael.

In closing: With the absence of a Sanhedrin or empirical evidence to decide the question is Medinat Yisrael an essential part of the final redemption of the Jewish nation centered around the Bet Hamikdash with all that it implies, or just one more chapter in our long and circuitous history? The decision rests with every individual.

There are those who feel intrinsically that our generation living in Eretz Yisrael has been designated by HaShem to open the initial chapter of our historic-religious redemption versus other good Jews who negate the idea; and of course, the ubiquitous silent majority who sit on the fence unable to decide.

In the light of what I have seen and experienced in the sixty-two years since making aliya, I have no doubt that we are on the fast track to the final goals set for us by HaShem. We are the foundation stone upon which future generations will build. We are a major part of the fulfillment of HaShem's promises to our forefathers.

And if it should come about that in the world of absolute truth, I will be told that I was mistaken, I will admit to the sin of loving too much; whereas the other side if told that they were in error would have to admit that they loved too little.

Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

Haredi enlistment is not the question

Why does Netanyahu, a decorated IDF hero, go along with the haredi exemption national shame? Why is he working on an Enlistment Law that perpetuates the haredi exemptions?

Tzvi Fishman

Tzvi Fishman was awarded the Israel Ministry of Education Prize for Jewish Culture and Creativity. Before making Aliyah to Israel in 1984, he was a successful Hollywood screenwriter. He has co-authored 4 books with Rabbi David Samson, based on the teachings of Rabbis A. Y. Kook and T. Y. Kook. His other books include: "The Kuzari For Young Readers" and "Tuvia in the Promised Land," available on Amazon. He directed the movie, "Stories of Rebbe Nachman."

Everyone seems to be expressing their disappointment (some would even say disgust), and rightfully so, with Israel's large haredi community for not stepping forward to join their Jewish brothers in the ongoing year-long existential war, an actual Milchemet Mitzvah, which Israel has been waging.

During the years that Israeli decision-makers believed we needed a small, smart army, the haredi exemption from the draft was justified - but with the IDF declaring that it is in need of more soldiers and is therefore calling up older reservists who leave wives and children at home, there is no justification at all for the thousands of haredi young men who are not

learning seriously (some say, as well as those who are) to be exempt from defending the Jewish state that also supports their yeshivas.

Needless to say, Netanyahu, a true patriot and proven soldier, is more than likely disgusted with this behavior as well. Why then does he go along with this national shame? Why is he working on an Enlistment Law that perpetuates the haredi exemptions?

First of all, he realizes that unmotivated soldiers who are forced to serve are of no use. The haredi sector has to change the way its young men look at the IDF and for their part, the IDF must create a suitable environment for the haredi soldier and, unlike its broken promises in the past, keep its word and refrain from trying to reeducate him.

But more crucial than that, it is because every decision has consequences and the prime minister knows the followings things are very likely to happen if the haredi parties withdraw from the coalition, causing the government to fall:

-The new government will be formed by the Left with an Arab party joining the new coalition and receiving hundreds of millions of shekels for the service.

-Paper-thin peace treaties will be signed with the Hezbollah and Hamas leading to a far worse war in the future.

-The hostages in Gaza will be freed for the release of thousands of terrorists.

-Jewish settlement in Yesha will be frozen.

-Arab illegal settlement throughout the country will increase.

-Hilltop youth and settlers will be imprisoned without trial.

-The Two-State Solution will become a reality.

-Gay organizations will receive massive State funding.

-Reform prayer services will be authorized at the Kotel.

-Tens of thousands of haredim will leave the country.

-The Supreme Court will turn Israel into a legal police state

-Arutz 14 will be closed.

-Arutz 7 will be closed.

-Political witch hunts against the Right and false charges of assassination plots will abound.

-Iran will be allowed to develop a nuclear bomb.

Yes, it is a disgrace to enact a law allowing haredim to remain draft dodgers while the rest of the nation goes to war. But the alternative would be far worse.

Since this coming Shabbos is also Rosh Chodesh, this question may become very germane.

What if I goofed and said Tikanta Shabbos by mistake? By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question: In the middle of davening Musaf on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, I realized that I was reciting the Musaf for a regular Shabbos rather than the special Musaf for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. What should I have done?

Answer:

This Shabbos is also Rosh Chodesh, requiring the recital of a special text for the middle beracha of Musaf. This special Musaf includes elements of the usual Shabbos Musaf, the usual Rosh Chodesh Musaf, and a special introductory passage. This passage, beginning with the words Atah Yatzarta, actually bears close resemblance to the introductory part of the Yom Tov Musaf rather than to Musaf of either Shabbos or Rosh Chodesh. The rest of the middle beracha of Musaf combines elements of both Shabbos Musaf and Rosh Chodesh Musaf.

I once edited an article in which the author quoted several anthologies, each of which ruled that someone still in the middle beracha of shemoneh esrei should immediately stop where he is, and go to the beginning of Atah Yatzarta, and recite the entire beracha. However, I believe that this ruling is in error, which I will explain shortly. But first...

I attempted to trace the sources quoted in the article to see if perhaps I was missing some logic or information that I would clarify in the course of my research.

What I did discover was that each source was simply quoting a previous one, and that they all traced to one obscure 19th century work, which did not explain at all the reason for the ruling. Classic group-think.

I will now explain why I believe this ruling is in error, and what one should do. My major concern is that the approach that these works advocate results in repeating many parts of the shemoneh esrei, and that this repetition constitutes a forbidden interruption in the tefillah. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there is no essential requirement to recite this middle beracha of the shemoneh esrei precisely in order. Obviously, one should maintain the order as is, but there is ample evidence from major halacha authorities that, in general, mistakenly rearranging the order of a beracha is not calamitous (see, for example, Rosh, Taanis 1:1; Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:18 and 4:70:14). Thus, when left with the choice of rearranging the order of a beracha to avoid repetition, or repeating parts of the beracha and ignoring what was already said, one should follow the first approach (cf., however, Biur Halacha 127:2 s.v. Aval).

Based on the above, it appears that someone who discovers that they began reciting Tikanta Shabbos rather than Atah Yatzarta should mention only those parts of the beracha that they had as yet not recited, but not repeat any theme or part of the beracha that one has already said. Although fulfilling this may be confusing to someone unfamiliar with the beracha, this should provide us with a valid reason to pay more attention to the details of this beracha and understand its different parts.

In order to explain how one does this correctly, I will divide the beracha of Atah Yatzarta into its constituent parts, so that we can identify which parts we should not repeat. We can divide it into the following seven sections:

1. The introduction – from the words Atah Yatzarta until (and including) the words shenishtalcha (some recite the text hashelucha) bemikdashecha.
2. The prayer for our return – beginning with the words Yehi Ratzon – until (and including) the word kehilchasam.
3. The sentence that introduces the mention of the pesukim of the Musaf – Ve’es Musafei Yom HaShabbos hazeh... until (and including) the word ka’amur.
4. Mention of the pesukim of the korban Musaf of Shabbos.
5. Mention of the pasuk of the korban Musaf of Rosh Chodesh and the passage Uminchasam... until (and including) the word kehilchasam.
6. The paragraph Yismechu Vemalchusecha that concludes with the words zeicher lemaasei vereishis.
7. The closing of the beracha -- Elokeinu Veilokei avoseinu.

On a regular Shabbos we recite the following sections: I have numbered them in a way that parallels the previous list:

1. Tikanta Shabbos – the introduction.
2. Yehi Ratzon – the prayer for our return. This passage then introduces the mention of the pesukim of the Musaf, which includes only the pesukim of Shabbos.

3. Ve’es Musaf Yom HaShabbos hazeh... until the word ka’amur.
4. Mention of the pesukim of the korban Musaf of Shabbos.
6. The paragraph Yismechu Vemalchusecha that concludes with the words zeicher lemaasei vereishis.
7. The closing of the beracha -- Elokeinu Veilokei avoseinu. We should note that the closings of the Shabbos and the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh shemoneh esrei prayers are very different. On Shabbos Rosh Chodesh we recite a version that is almost identical to what we recite on a weekday Rosh Chodesh, but we insert three passages to include Shabbos.

See chart next page.

Parts 2, 4 and 6 of the two brachos are identical, whether it is Shabbos or Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. Therefore, one should not repeat these sections if one has said them already.

Part 1 on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, Atah Yatzarta, is very different from what we usually recite on a regular Shabbos. Therefore, someone who mistakenly said the regular Shabbos beracha should go back and recite this passage (part 1).

If someone missed part 5, which mentions the pesukim of Rosh Chodesh, and is still in the middle of this section, they should recite – the pasuk that describes the korbon of rosh chodesh and introduce it with part 3 above, which introduces the Musaf korbanos. However, if they already recited the pesukim of Shabbos korban Musaf (part 4) above, omit the reference to Shabbos in this piece and only mention Rosh Chodesh. In the latter case, one should change the plural Musafei to a singular Musaf since now he is now referring only to the Rosh Chodesh Musaf.

Having explained the rules governing these halachos, I will now present the conclusions in a hopefully clearer way, depending on when you discover your mistake:

- A. If you were still reciting the beginning of Tikanta Shabbos, and had not yet reached Yehi Ratzon:
Return to Atah Yatzarta and recite the beracha in order, without any changes.
- B. If you had already begun Yehi Ratzon, but are before Ve’es Musaf Yom HaShabbos hazeh:
Complete the Yehi Ratzon until Ve’es Musaf; then recite Atah Yatzarta until the words Yehi Ratzon, then resume from the words Ve’es Musafei Yom HaShabbos hazeh veyom Rosh Hachodesh hazeh from the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Musaf and continue through the rest of the tefillah.
- C. If you had just begun Ve’es Musaf Yom HaShabbos hazeh:
Add the words Ve’es Musaf Yom Rosh Hachodesh Hazeh, then continue in the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Musaf until Yismechu Vemalchusecha. Immediately prior to saying Yismechu Vemalchusecha insert the words from Atah Yatzarta until the words shenishtalcha bemikdashecha (part 1). Then return to Yismechu Vemalchusecha and recite the rest of the tefillah in order.

- D. If you are already in the middle of Ve’es Musaf Yom HaShabbos hazeh:
Recite Uveyom Hashabbas... until veniskah. Then insert the words from Atah Yatzarta until the words shenishtalcha bemikdashecha. Then return to the words Ve’es Musaf but say the following: Ve’es Musaf Yom Rosh Hachodesh hazeh until the word ka’amur. Then say Uvershei Chadshechem in the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh section and continue in order.

E. If you are in the middle of Yismechu Vemalchusecha, complete it until Zecher lemaasei vereishis, and then insert the words from Atah Yatzarta until the words shenishtalcha bemikdashecha. Then return to the words Ve'es Musaf but say the following: Ve'es Musaf Yom Rosh Hachodesh hazeh until the word ka'amur. Then say Uverashei Chadsheichem in the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh section. Then go to Elokeinu Veilokei avoseinu (after Yismechu Vemalchusecha) and finish the end of the beracha.

F. If you are already in the middle of the closing part of the beracha (Elokeinu Veilokei Avoseinu) complete the clause that you are saying, and then insert the words from Atah Yatzarta until the words shenishtalcha bemikdashecha. Return to the words Ve'es Musaf but say Ve'es Musaf Yom Rosh Hachodesh hazeh until the word ka'amur. Say Uverashei Chadsheichem from the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh section. Then return to chadeish aleinu beyom haShabbos hazeh es hachodesh hazeh and finish the end of the beracha in the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh section.

If he completed the entire beracha of Tikanta Shabbos, but mentioned in the middle of the brocha some reference to the korban Musaf of Rosh Chodesh, he has fulfilled the requirements of his prayer and he should continue Retzei (see Mishnah Berurah 423:6). If he completed the beracha of Tikanta Shabbos but did not yet begin Retzeih, he should say “venaaseh lefanecha korban Rosh Chodesh hazeh” – “and we shall do before You this Rosh Chodesh offering” – and then continue with Retzeih (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

Although all this may sound confusing, if you spend a few minutes familiarizing oneself with the divisions of this beracha that I have made, you will easily realize how the parts of the Shabbos and Shabbos Rosh Chodesh davening are aligned. Then you will be ready to make the necessary adjustments should you find that you have erred. This readiness has, of course, a tremendous value on its own: It familiarizes one with the shemoneh esrei, something we always should do, but, unfortunately, is something to which we often do not pay adequate attention.

Understanding how much concern Chazal placed in the relatively minor aspects of davening should make us even more aware of the fact that davening is our attempt at building a relationship with Hashem. As the Kuzari notes, every day should have three very high points -- the three times that we daven (or four times on days that we recite Musaf). Certainly, one should do whatever one can to make sure to pay attention to the meaning of the words of one's Tefillah. We should gain our strength and inspiration for the rest of the day from these prayers. Let us hope that Hashem will accept our tefillos together with those of Klal Yisrael

Reverence for Sacred Vessels

Rav Kook Torah

The Torah commands us to show reverence for the human body, even after the soul has departed. A body should be buried quickly, we are taught, lest its dignity be compromised. Leaving a body exposed is “a blasphemy of God” (Deut. 21:23).

However, in cases where the body is at risk of desecration — if there is a fear that robbers or enemies may abduct the remains for ransom — the Torah permits us to act in ways that, under ordinary circumstances, would seem disrespectful. To protect the body, one is allowed to conceal it in a sack and even sit upon it.

The Talmud in Berachot 18a teaches that these guidelines of respect shown to human remains also apply to Torah scrolls.

Like a Torah Scroll

This comparison, Rav Kook explains, is highly instructive.

Why do we honor Torah scrolls? We do so to instill within ourselves a love of Torah and a commitment to fulfill its words. We cherish these vessels of divine wisdom, recognizing that they facilitate our spiritual growth.

The same applies to the respect given to human remains. Honoring the body after death reminds us of the profound connection between the physical and the divine. This reverence underscores a vital truth: our bodies are instruments through which we pursue holiness. With our limbs and physical senses, we observe the Torah's mitzvot, pursue its paths of purity and righteousness, and grow in wisdom and sanctity.

What emerges is a unified teaching: reverence for the human body, like that for Torah scrolls, strengthens our resolve to live a life aligned with the ways of God, which are “life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh” (Proverbs 4:22)

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha

Fish with Legs??

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

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

A Fishy Tale?

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

What is a (Kosher) Fish?

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

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

As for our *Stincus Marinus*, which had scales but legs instead of fins, the *Tosafos Yom Tov*^[7] averred that this “fish” cannot be considered kosher, as the above mentioned ruling was referring exclusively to actual fish and not sea creatures. Since the *Stincus Marinus* has legs instead of fins, it could not be considered a true fish, and must therefore not be kosher.

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

However, the *Pri Chodosh*^[10] rejected the opinion of the *Tosafos Yom Tov*, maintaining that Chazal's rule that “whatever has scales also has fins, and is presumed kosher”, equally applies to all sea creatures, not just

fish, and actually ruled that the *Stincus Marinus* is indeed kosher, irregardless of whether or not it is considered a true fish.

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

Rule of Thumb (or Fin)

The renowned Rav Yonason Eibshutz, 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 *sherez* (non-kosher crawling land animal)! This would make the entire preceding halachic discussion irrelevant, as the *Stincus Marinus* would not fall under the category of Chazal’s statement, and would thereby be 100% non-kosher. The *Kozeglover Gaon*[18] actually uses this “fish” as a testament to the Divinity of the Torah, as the only known exception to Chazal’s rule turned out to be not a fish at all, but rather a type of lizard! On the other hand, not only does the *Darchei Teshuva*[19] not accept Rabbi Avraham Zutra’s scientific study, but even writes a scathing response that he does not understand how one can place these findings from non-Halachic sources between teshuvos HaGaonim without a clear proof from Chazal or Poskim “sherak mipehem unu chayim”. Accordingly, this opinion of the *Darchei Teshuva* would also unsubstantiate the conclusion of the *Chasam Sofer*, for although the *Chasam Sofer* agreed to the *Tosafos Yom Tov*’s conclusion that the *Stincus Marinus* is not kosher, his claim that it is not a true sea creature is based on “scientific experts”. Therefore, this scientific analysis that the *Stincus Marinus* be considered a lizard or scorpion, may not actually be acknowledged by all.

Practical Impracticality

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

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

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

Postscript:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[12] There seemingly is precedent for such a theory based on the words of several *Rishonim* describing the *Pelishti Avodah Zarah ‘Dagon’* (*Shmuel I Ch. 5: 2 - 7*), which many, including *Rashi* (*ad loc. 2 s.v. eitzel*), the *Raavad* (in his commentary to *Avodah Zarah* 41a), and *R’ Menachem Ibn Saruk* (*Machaber 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 Hachraos Rabbeinu Tam (ad loc.) for alternate interpretations, including that of a hybrid half-man half-fish idol, in which case, as the top half was in human form, would have had human hands. According to this interpretation, this passage would not yield any proof to the Bechor Shor's assessment. Thanks are due to Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein for pointing out this interesting tangent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shrager, 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.

© 1995-2024 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Noach Noach Words produce light

This powerful message emerges at the commencement of Parshat Noach. Hashem commanded Noach to construct an ark, instructing him, "tzohar ta'aseh latevah" — "make a window for the Ark", enabling it to be bathed in light so that it can reflect that light.

The Sefat Emet brilliantly comments that the Hebrew word "tevah," which means "Ark", also means "word" in Mishnaic Hebrew. At a homiletical level, he suggests that Hashem was saying to Noah: "tzohar ta'aseh latevah"—enable the word to be bathed in light so that it can reflect light. Where were we standing at that point?

Hashem had seen how the first ten generations on earth were a disaster. As a result, He was just about to press the reset button, making Noah, an 'Adam mark two'. Hashem was indicating to Noah that the violence and destruction prevalent during these generations were predominantly produced by words — the darkness of words, and the danger arising from them.

As we were about to recommence life in a new era, Hashem wanted us to know that we can ensure our words transmit and reflect light. Words can produce light.

This message is particularly relevant today, given the harm caused by negative statements that poison minds around the globe. For the sake of our peace, our tranquillity, and the future of our fragile world, let's guarantee that our words will always produce light!

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Noach

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Sheindil bas Mordechai.

It's Not About You

These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with God. Noach gave birth to three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yefes (6:9-10).

Rashi, in his comments on this possuk, quotes the Midrash; "To teach you that the primary 'offspring' of the righteous are good deeds" (see Rashi ad loc and Midrash Rabbah 30:6). In other words, our sages are bothered by the structure of the verses; the first verse begins with the introduction of "these are the offspring of Noach" and then goes on to describe how righteous Noach was instead of telling us who his children were. From here, Chazal conclude that the fundamental "offspring" of a tzaddik are his good deeds.

Maharal (see Gur Aryeh ad loc) elaborates on this Chazal: “There are three partners in the creation of a child; the man, the woman and, most importantly, Hashem. On the other hand, a person’s deeds are solely his own. Therefore, the primary offspring of someone are his good deeds.”

Yet, if this is the basis for the Midrash, why did Chazal teach us that the “primary offspring of the righteous are their good deeds;” the fundamental offspring of every person should be their good deeds!

Most people focus on their own existence with their lives primarily revolving around themselves and their needs. At the same time, they have an innate sense that they are a perishable product (i.e. they have an “expiration date”). There are a couple of ways that people respond to these instincts: Some constantly seek pleasure, knowing that this “ride” will at some point come to an end. Others seek to connect to something outside of themselves and expand their existence by loving others and being loved.

This is the motivation for most people to have children. They want to connect to something outside of themselves; to give and receive love and to see themselves continue on, even after they are no longer physically here on earth. Having children, who are similar to oneself in so many ways, is a very palpable and satisfying way of perpetuating one’s existence.

In contrast, those who are truly righteous do not focus on their own existence or their narrow needs. They have internalized that they are living in a theocentric world and that their primary objective is to forward Hashem’s agenda for the world. Their good deeds actually serve to define who they are, and therefore become an absolute reflection of themselves. Their good deeds reflect their righteousness.

Of course, righteous people desire children as well. However, they recognize that their fundamental reason for existence is not to figure out how to perpetuate themselves, but rather what they themselves can do to perfect the world. Maharal (ad loc) actually points out that in this manner the good deeds of the righteous actually serve to give birth to them; because that is a perfect definition of who they are.

East of Eden

Then Hashem said to Noach, “Come to the ark, you and your entire household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation. From the pure animals take for yourself seven by seven a male and its mate [...]” (7:1-2).

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 34:9) explains that Hashem commanded Noach to take from the “pure” (i.e. kosher) animals more than he took from the rest of the animals in order to bring them as sacrifices. That is to say that from all the animals in the world Noach took in only a single pair, but from the kosher animals he took into the teivah seven pairs (although

according to some, Noach brought a total of seven from the kosher animals – four males and three females).

The teivah wasn’t a pleasant place to be, it was crowded and smelly and mostly dark. In addition, Noach and his sons were constantly on call to feed and care for all of the animals (compounding this misery was the fact that animals eat at different times of the day and night). Rashi (7:23) comments that Noach was actually coughing up blood from the stress of caring for the animals. In fact, according to the Midrash (Tanchuma Parshas Noach) Noach was so miserable that he davened to Hashem to shorten the time necessary to be on the ark (he was turned down).

Seeing as this was the case, why did Hashem tell Noach to bring even more animals into the ark (the extra kosher ones that were to be brought as sacrifices)? Surely Noach, who lived for over three hundred years after the Great Flood, could have waited a decade or two for the animals to give birth and build large herds. At that time, he would have had plenty of the kosher animals on hand from which to sacrifice. Why did Hashem ask him to bring them onto the teivah?

Hashem was giving Noach and his children an important message. Even though Hashem had decreed that the world had to be destroyed because mankind had totally perverted it, Hashem still desired a relationship with man. Hashem wanted Noach and his children to be able to offer sacrifices immediately after leaving the teivah in order to begin to reconnect and repair His relationship with mankind.

This would also explain Noach’s seemingly outrageous behavior of making it a priority to build a vineyard upon exiting the ark. Bal Haturim comments on the verse “and Noach, man of the earth, set out to plant a vineyard” (9:20), that Noach actually planted what he had taken from the Garden of Eden – according to one opinion in the Gemara (Brachos 40a) the Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine – because Noach thought that he was to replicate the Garden of Eden.

In other words, Noach misunderstood Hashem’s desire for a relationship with mankind. Noach thought that once he came out of the ark he and his children would be back at the level of Adam prior to the original sin and that they would be welcomed back to the Garden of Eden, so he took the vines that he had brought into the ark and planted them to begin that process.

However, in reality, Hashem was giving him a more powerful message. Hashem was letting him know that He desired to have a relationship with us even in our world, outside of the Garden. Hashem did not want him to have to wait many decades in order to bring sacrifices, He wanted Noach to open the lines of communication right away upon leaving the ark.

לע”נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
בִּילָא בָת (אַרְיָה) לִיב ע"ה
אנָא מֶלֶכה בָת יִשְׂרָאֵל

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 8 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 NOACH

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

FROM A LIST TO AN OUTLINE

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

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

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

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

etc.

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

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

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

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

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

ENTER - 'TOLADOT'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS A TOLADA?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TWO SECTIONS OF SEFER BREISHIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHEM & SHEM HASHEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM IS CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

(Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4).

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

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

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

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

Now, see 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 briyat ha-olam. Recall that Avraham was born in year 1948!

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

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

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

for PARSHAT NOACH - 3 additional shiurim

SHIUR #1

TOLADOT BNEI NOACH 'Setting the stage' for Sefer Breishit

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

SPECIAL DETAILS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'SETTING THE STAGE'

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

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

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

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

SHIUR #2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEFORE THE FLOOD

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

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

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

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

AFTER THE FLOOD

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

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

BEFORE MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

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

AT MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

BACK TO ENOSH

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

"LIKRO B'SHEM HASHEM"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

=====

SHIUR #3 - TOLADOT BNEI NOACH [Chapter Ten]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
Menachem

Parshat No'ah: Creation Unzipped

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

QUICK REVIEW:

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

A DOSE OF REALITY:

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

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT:

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

BERESHIT 6:5-7 --

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

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

THE FLOOD: MANIFESTATION OF A DEEPER DESTRUCTION:

BERESHIT 6:11 --

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

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

PLANNING AHEAD:

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

BERESHIT 7:1-6 --

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

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

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

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

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

THE "UNZIPPING" OF THE WORLD:

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

BERESHIT 7:6 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

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

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

THE NEXT STEP:

BERESHIT 7:10-11 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

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

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

Let us continue in Parashat No'ah:

BERESHIT 7:13-14 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:25 --

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

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

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

BERESHIT 7:19-20 --

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

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

CREATION, TAKE II:

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

BERESHIT 8:1 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:2 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:2 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:5-14 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:21-22 --

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

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

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

Not necessarily. Note that our parasha is the turning point between two phases of Hashem's relationship with humanity: in phase one, he creates humanity and assigns it a mission: to reflect the divine. Kayyin (Cain) is the first to fail this mission: he murders his brother, but seems to learn little from Hashem's reaction, as he neglects to impress upon his children the value of human life; his grandchildren continue his murderous pattern. Adam and Hava react by attempting to replace their first two children with a third child: Shet, who is described by the Torah as "created in the image" of Adam, who himself had been created in the image of God. Shet is Adam's hope; success in the tzelem Elokim mission rides upon his shoulders. But after several generations, humanity degenerates into violence and corruption, convincing Hashem that He had made a mistake by creating humanity. Hashem appears to preserve some hope for humanity, as he saves the life of Noah and his family. But Noah, too, disappoints Hashem, founding the new world only to plant a vineyard and stupefy himself with the wine it produces. Hashem now waits, as the generations pass -- He waits for someone like Avraham, whose appearance

marks phase two of Hashem's relationship with humanity. At some point between Noah and Avraham, Hashem gives up the notion that ALL of humanity can achieve the ideal, that ALL of humanity can maintain a relationship with Him as reflections of His divinity. Hashem decides that the great experiment of humanity can continue only with a small, select group of subjects. Hashem now looks for an individual or group of individuals to set an example for the rest of the world. Avraham is that individual; he and the nation he will found are selected for intimate relationship with Hashem. The rest of the world has shown that it is unable to maintain such a relationship, so Hashem now turns his attention to a select group. The aftermath of the Flood is the turning point at which the idea of an "Am Segula," a most-favored, most-treasured nation, takes shape. The damp soil of the Flood is the fertile ground from which sprouts the seed of Kelal Yisrael.

Shabbat shalom