

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 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.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May we soon retrieve the remaining bodies of our hostages and soldiers who fell in Gaza, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

With every yom tov for the past month coming during the work week and none coinciding with Shabbat, and with travel and various other obligations, I did not have sufficient work time to put out Devrei Torah. In particular, I missed Bereishis, so I am starting with a few words to set a context for the new Torah cycle. In His process of creating the world, Hashem says "Let us. . ." Who is the "us" with whom God creates the world? As Rabbi David Fohrman indicates, Hashem's partner in creation is adamah, or the earth. The earth provides the physical component of life, and God provides the Divine spark and moral fabric.

How are we to understand the evolution story in the Torah, and how do we combine belief in the Torah with a modern understanding of science? For example, does God create the world in seven days (of which day seven is Shabbat)? In the beginning, the earth is a dark mass covered with water, and God's spirit blows over it. Day and night have no meaning in the beginning, before there is light. The point is that the Torah is not a history book. The Torah is a book to guide us to proper living in a world that we share with the Divine Creator. Everything in the Torah has a purpose to give us insights into how to live in our world and create a relationship with Hashem. Events in history that do not help us understand how to live are not in the Torah. Thus, dinosaurs have no lessons to guide humans to live properly, so the Torah ignores dinosaurs. Also, Adam and Chava's sons get married and have children. How do they meet their wives when they are the first humans? This information is not necessary for us to understand how to live properly in our world, so the Torah is silent on this and many other questions.

The world that Adam and the rest of the beginning generations inherit quickly becomes violent. In Noach, God regrets having created the world. He concludes that violent and evil humans have made the world evil. God focuses on Noach, the only moral person, and directs him to build an teva (ark) to save his immediate family and the animals. Noach works on the ark for 120 years – but during that time he does not explain to any other people why God plans to save him. Noach does not gain any converts, so no other individuals or families deserve to be saved. When the rains start, Hashem tells Noach to load the animals and his family; He then closes the door to the teva.

The Torah reports the Mabul (flood) in reverse order of creation – God unwinds creation and returns the earth to a body of water with His breath (the wind) blowing across it. After the Mabul, the Torah repeats the creation story in the same order – the message is that God is repeating creation. The difference is that the rules for humans are different this time. The recreated world is less sensitive to the sins of humans. For the first time, God gives Noach and other humans permission

to eat meat. Rather than destroying the world when humans sin, God intervenes earlier in the process. For example, the generation of Babel decides to use technology for evil. (Rather than building with Hashem's stones, they make bricks to serve as their human designed stones). God confuses the language of the people so they cannot work together for evil (building a tower to heaven to challenge God).

Several of the Devrei Torah that I have selected focus on what we can learn in 5786 from the parsha. At Hashem's command, Noach emerges from his Ark and faces a destroyed world. His task is to find a way to rebuild and move forward. We Jews have faced a similar crisis and task many times in our history. In the Haftarah this week, Isaiah directs B'Nai Yisrael to work for a better future, even when we must build upon the ashes of tragedy. After the destructions of the Temples, our Jewish exiles have to start new lives in Babylon and wherever they could escape after the Roman massacres. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that the fourth bracha of Birchat HaMazon dates to the Second Century, the time of the bloody culmination of the unsuccessful Bar Kokhba rebellion. Our people have faced similar challenges after the Crusades, pogroms, Nazi death camps, and Arab battles. As we emerge from the High Holy days, and now that the remaining living hostages are back in Israel, God again demands that we create a better future, even while we work toward recovering the bodies of hostages and others of our people who have fallen in Gaza. Putting our grief aside and working toward rebuilding is difficult – but that is our challenge now.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, reminds us that God gives us permission and expects us to go ahead and rebuild a shattered world. He adds that a significant part of what faith is in Judaism is the courage to pursue, do something new, and take a road less traveled to make the world a better place. Rabbi Aharon Loschak summarizes by saying that when we face the tidal waves of life, Hashem provides a lifeboat to enable us to end up on top.

For two long years, our people have fought the evil of Hamas and floods of anti-Semitism throughout the world. We finally see progress toward a better future. While evil is active throughout the world, our mandate is to work toward bringing Hashem's values into the broader world. Rather than focusing on the death and destruction in Parshat Noach, let us ponder its message of hope and direction toward tikkun olam.

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeez Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, 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; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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 and Hodesh Tov,

Hannah & Alan

Noach: Sprouting from the Ashes

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

When Noach leaves the ark, he witnesses a sight of destruction and desolation that is difficult for us to comprehend. All animal life on earth, other than the few of each species that had remained on board his vessel, had utterly perished. We can imagine the impact that the eerie silence, the stillness, and the memory of all that had been and was wiped out must have had on Noach's psyche. And it is therefore no surprise that one of his first actions was to produce wine, seeking to intoxicate himself into forgetfulness.

The alcohol in Noach's wine was not only meant to numb his suffering. It was a desperate attempt to escape from his meaningful yet excruciating mandate to engage with the broken world he encountered. As the Mishna in Avot 3:10 teaches: *"Midday wine... puts a man out of the world."* The episode of Noach's drunkenness is thus a poignant commentary on the difficulty of beginning again in a universe that has seen death and pain. On some level in our own day, amid the fragile ceasefire in Gaza after two years of war and enormous loss of life, we too face the struggle of beginning again. The temptation to retreat into numbness is real, but the Torah calls on us, as it did to Noach, to confront our pain and rebuild with courage and faith.

Appropriately paired with the parsha, this week's haftara of consolation from the book of Isaiah speaks to this difficulty with words of beauty and grace. It charges us with the responsibility that we bear toward ourselves and our descendants to guarantee the continuation and rehabilitation of the world, even when the suffering it contains seems overwhelming. The prophecy, issued in the wake of the destruction wrought by the invasion of Israel's enemies, begins with a command to our people to find joy amidst difficulty: *"Barren woman, never a mother, rejoice!"* 54:1(. It continues by describing the future flourishing and expansion of the nation's society and civilization, encouraging Am Israel to prepare for renewal, despite the losses and tragedies:

Broaden the site of your tent; stretch out your canvas home; do not hold back; lengthen your tent cords, and strengthen its pegs: you shall overflow rightward and left, your children possessing nations, and filling forsaken towns with life.)vv. 2-3(

It is not a coincidence that this command mirrors God's directive to Noach in our parsha, *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"*)Genesis 9:1(. We can guess that both prescriptions, understandably, were met with incredulity among the people. After all that had happened, how could they rebuild? How could they rejoice? But such commands also inspire optimism. **God's insistent demand** that we do just these things, that we put all of our might into picking ourselves up again, **shows how much He believes in our ability to create a better future, even when it must be built on the ashes of tragedy.**]emphasis added[

Now, thank God, as all of Israel's remaining live hostages have been returned, we can begin to confront the grief and pain that the last two years have inflicted on our people. Figuratively, and in some very important instances, literally, we have not yet buried our dead: bodies of murdered hostages still remain in Gaza and our national and personal losses are difficult to comprehend. But amidst all of the darkness and difficulty, we must find it within ourselves to branch out and rebuild, broadening the sites of our tents in our country's war-torn northern and southern reaches, and within our own hearts. This includes caring for the mental and emotional health of our families, soldiers and citizens of Israel. By putting our efforts into making a better future for ourselves and our families, we demonstrate faith in God's limitless ability to redeem and liberate us, even in the face of all the challenges that come with trauma.

Rabbi Yediyah Lau, head of our Joseph and Gwendolyn Straus Rabbinical Seminary, shared that the blessing “הַטּוֹב הַיְהוֹמָטִיב” [“*The Kind One who Bestows Kindness*”], in the fourth and final section of the Grace After Meals, was composed after the fall of the city of Beitar during the bloody culmination of the second century Bar Kokhba rebellion against the Romans; when the Jewish people were able to bury their slain (Brachot 48b). The battle was a large-scale catastrophe marked by the massacre of men, women, and children. And yet, the Sages teach, a miracle occurred that preserved the numerous corpses intact until the surviving Jews could reach them, allowing them the final dignity of burial. The ability of the Jewish leadership of the time to use that traumatic event as an opportunity to celebrate God’s kindness shows the deep commitment of our people to finding the miraculous potential for salvation even in the most trying of circumstances. Today, we have much to be thankful for, and we also have much to mourn. God’s lesson through the story of Noach and the prophecy of Isaiah is that even in the face of all the difficulty and trauma, we must still recognize the blessings and opportunities that await us. We cannot allow our justified sadness at what we have lost to negate our joy at all we have achieved, and at all the kindnesses that a benevolent God has granted us. We must never cease to anticipate a future that will only be better and more blessed. Many generations of Jews have faced this challenge; now it is our turn to rebuild, to believe and to plant the seeds of an even brighter future.

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

Noach: Before it Rains By Rabbi Label Lam © 2007 (5767)

And Noach did all that HASHEM had commanded him, and Noach was six hundred years old and the flood waters were upon the earth. And Noach came and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him into the Ark because of the waters of the flood.)Breishis 7:5-7(

Because of the waters of the flood: Even Noach was from the small believers. He both believed and didn’t believe that the flood would come, and therefore he didn’t enter the Ark until the waters forced him.)Rashi(

Noach was a small believer? He didn’t believe the waters of the flood would really come? How is that possible? He worked for 120 years and exposed himself to extreme ridicule just to build that Ark! The verse said “*Noach did all that HASHEM had commanded him.*” How could he be from the small believers?

A similar accusation is made about Sara when she “*laughed within herself*” upon hearing that she would be having a child. Rashi)by the incident of Avraham’s laughing(tells us that Sara was rebuked because her laughter betrayed her disbelief. Sara didn’t believe? She prayed the length of her life for a child acknowledging *that “HASHEM has held me back from bearing.*” Now in a lapse moment the Torah records her inner thoughts and tars her with the brush as someone who didn’t believe in the possibility of what she has heard. Therefore she was in need of the rebuke, “*Is something too wondrous for HASHEM?!*”

The Chofetz Chaim points out that this faltering of belief is a foreshadowing of a future time when good Jews who have lived with the fervent hope that the Jewish People will again be restored to the Holy Land and the world set right will confront the realization of their dreams. So many of us repeat and sing those words of the 13 Fundamental Principles of Judaism, “*I believe with a perfect belief in the coming of the Moshiach, and although he tarries, even still I await his arrival each day!*”

What will that good hearted loyal Jew think when he glances at the headlines one morning and discovers it announces in clear terms what he had hoped for his entire life? A good portion of him is in total disbelief, denying it strongly as a hoax.

He is stricken with cognitive dissonance even after confirming the truth. Although he anticipated it on some level another part of him cannot process the actual paradigm shift.

How can one both believe and not believe simultaneously? Simple! A person is not one thing. Some pass the written exam of life with flying colors and still fail the driving test miserably. It is this deficiency that we are warned about by Noah's reaction to the arrival of the flood waters and Sara's response to even good news.

Reb Chaim from Sanz posed a question to one of his Chassidim as he passed by. *"What would you do if you found a wallet with a significant amount of money in it and there were clear identifiable signs for the owner to reclaim it?"* The man said in all sincerity, *"Why Rebbe, I would return it!"* The Rebbe exclaimed, *"Foolishness!"* The next gentleman was asked the same question about the wallet to which he responded, *"Rebbe, I would keep it!"* *"Ganav – Thief!"* the Rebbe proclaimed. A third man on the street when asked about the wallet answered, *"I don't know what I would do, Rebbe, but I hope I would have the moral resolve to do the right thing and return it to the rightful owner!"* *"Ahhhhh!"* sighed the Rebbe from Sanz, *"This is a wise man!"*

We can't know with certainty what we will do when the even the anticipated surprises of life leap upon us. All we can do is prepare for the eventuality and the inevitability of *"whatever"* through study, prayer, and a good imagination, because the best time to buy an umbrella is **before it rains**.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-noach/>

Noach: How Humankind Became Adults: The Challenges of Knowing Good and Evil by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2011, 2017

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 Noah, 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 desirable 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.** [emphasis added]

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!

From my archives

Raising a Tzadik: Thoughts for Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Many years ago, we were visiting friends when one of their sons, about seven or eight years old, came into the room. We chatted with him a bit, and my wife asked him: *"what do you want to be when you grow up?"* Without a moment of hesitation, he answered: *"I want to be a Tzadik."* Other boys might have answered that they wanted to be baseball players or firemen; but this little boy wanted to grow up to be a righteous Jew, a good man, a Tzadik.

Many years later, this little boy did indeed grow up to be a Tzadik. He is pious, learned, honest; he and his wife are raising their children also to be righteous Jews.

The child had the ingredients to grow into a wonderful man, but his parents were the ones who created the home environment that nurtured his talents and gave direction to his life.

In this week's Torah portion, we are informed that Noah was a Tzadik, a righteous and pure human being who walked with God. How did Noah achieve this high level of goodness? Obviously, he had innate wisdom and strength of character to be able to withstand the corrupt society in which he lived. But he also needed to be nurtured by devoted parents.

When he was born, Noah was given that name by his father Lemech, because *"he will comfort us (yehameinu) in our work and in the toil of our hands."* Lemech (and presumably his wife too) somehow sensed that Noah was destined for something special. They raised him so that he internalized those aspirations.

Good parents create environments that enable their children to flourish. Even the best of parents don't succeed every time, and even the worst of parents sometimes produce wonderful children. But as a rule, a nurturing home plays a vital part in human development.

To raise a Tzadik, parents must themselves live by the values they wish to convey to their children. Otherwise, the children will quickly realize that the parents are not sincere, not truthful, not worthy of emulation.

What's true of parents and children is also true of rabbis, teachers, and everyone else who wishes to impact on others. Good role models help generate good followers. Bad role models generate negative results.

When I was a rabbinical student, Rabbi Israel Miller (of blessed memory) told us: *"A rabbi's sermons are meaningful not only for what the rabbi says, but more for who the rabbi is."* If the rabbi preaches charity, but is not charitable; if the rabbi speaks of prayer, but is not prayerful; if the rabbi sermonizes about humility, but is vain and egocentric — then the rabbi's messages will ring false. An inauthentic rabbi is not — and cannot be — a role model of authentic Judaism.

Noah lived in a corrupt society but was able to be a Tzadik, a pure person who walked with God. This is surely a tribute to Noah's greatness. But it also is a tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Lemech, Noah's parents, who provided the spiritual and moral nourishment that sustained Noah...and saved humanity.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3380>

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Which Judaism Should We Teach Our Children, and When?

By Menachem Kellner *

Several years ago a group of young, married, highly successful Orthodox professionals (physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc.) invited me to lead them in discussions of Jewish texts at their monthly get-togethers. The project broke up after several months when one of the couples divorced, creating a split in the community. But even before the couple broke up, it was quite evident to my wife (who joined me) and to me that I was not providing the sort of instruction they sought. I thought that I was being asked to teach them as a (then young) professor of medieval Jewish philosophy; it turns out that what they really wanted was the sort of homilies they had been hearing from rabbis and teachers ever since grade school.

I love Rashi, but I am very much aware that he provides an interpretation of the Torah, an interpretation full of biblical and midrashic literalism, not to mention superstitious beliefs.[1] We all learned Rashi's Torah when we were in grade school. My wife and I have been consistently surprised over the years to encounter friends and relatives whose professional lives (physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc.) are carried on at a high level of sophistication but whose Judaism remains at the level they were taught in grade school. The same can be said of many rabbis.

Many people are happy living Jewishly like this, and we say, more power to them. But what of those who are not? Some leave traditional Judaism altogether, some live bifurcated lives, and some live as anusim, marranos, hiding their true views from friends and family. Apropos marranos, we once asked a woman we know, wife of a very prominent rabbi, a renowned scholar in her own right, and a forthright feminist, how she "got away" with her "outrageous" views. Her answer was simple: I dress the part I am expected to play — my old-fashioned sheitl allows me to think and say things not usually expressed by people who look like me. Similarly, I once asked a Chabadnik of my acquaintance, prominent in his community, but whose views on Judaism were closer to mine than to those usually found in Chabad circles, what he told his children. He answered that he never lies to his children, but does not feel obligated to tell them all that he thinks either.

Rav Sa'adia Gaon was well aware of this problem in Baghdad in the eleventh century. He wrote his *Beliefs and Doctrines* for Jews who were not satisfied with "*Rashi's Judaism*." He did not address his book to those who were satisfied with the Judaism taught to them as children, and warned them not to read the book. I am sure he would have said about them: "*More power to you.*" Rambam was himself also deeply aware of this issue. As is well-known, he wrote esoterically, hiding his true views from "*Rashi Jews*" in order to protect them. He also wrote carefully, modulating the way he expressed himself so that my beloved Lakewood relatives would be sure they understood what he was writing, while I am equally sure that they did not understand what he was really trying to say (for examples, see the first sentences in *Mishneh Torah* — "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah: i.1 and further on, vii.1). If I had a shekel for every time a traditionally educated student said to me after reading a Rambam text black on white, "*But it is not possible that Rambam could have written that!*" I could have retired years ago.

"*Rashi's Judaism*" is certainly warm and comforting, something we all need. But it is also disappointing to people who accept modern science as a route to truth, who reject superstition, who believe that all human beings are actually created in the image of God. "*Rashi's Judaism*" is also challenging for people who accept the values of liberal democracy. I must

emphasize, the issue is not one of intelligence or personal sophistication, let alone of Jewish education. The following story illustrates this point:

When a friend of mine was a scholar-in-residence at a prominent Modern Orthodox synagogue years ago, he taught the passage at the end of “Laws of Slaves” in *Mishneh Torah* in which Maimonides emphasizes that Jews and Gentiles are all created equal by God and formed “*in the same womb*,” i.e., there is no essential difference between Jews and Gentiles.[2] In the synagogue there was a sophisticated Torah scholar in his 20s who was also the son of a prominent yeshiva head. He protested this purported equality, and stayed with my friend for almost an hour after the Sabbath arguing that Maimonides did not say this because he could not have said it. The belief in Jewish superiority was an essential part of the young scholar’s personal sense of Jewish identity. He had formed this identity under the influence of his parents, their peers, and his peers. The text was merely secondary and after the fact. When he saw the text, he was forced either to distort it or to deny its importance. After my friend proved to him that the universalistic interpretation was correct by citing numerous other Maimonidean texts in the *Mishneh Torah* and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, this product of the best Modern Orthodox education gave up on Maimonides and said it really didn't matter what Maimonides said because he (and presumably “*the Torah world*”) had decided in accordance with the views of Judah Halevi anyway. His prejudice was so deep that he preferred the opinion of the non-halakhist Halevi to that of the greatest halakhist in Jewish history!

I had a similar experience in my own synagogue in Haifa many years ago. I sought to prove to an older friend in the synagogue, a wonderful man and a learned Jew, that Rambam did not agree with Halevi (or with Kabbalah, or with much of Orthodoxy today, “*yeshivish*” or not) according to which Jews are inherently distinct from and superior to non-Jews. In contrast, I maintained that Rambam held that when the Torah taught that all human beings are wholly and equally created in the image of God, it meant it. I ended up writing a whole book on the subject (*Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People*, 1991). My friend read the book and then told me that I had made a compelling argument and that, in consequence, his respect for Rambam had declined.

I am not foolish enough to think that Rambam’s Judaism, not Rashi’s Judaism, should be taught to first graders. But when do our educators start the transition from grade school, to high school, to college, to yeshiva? All too often it appears that the answer today is: Never. I trust and hope that readers of *Conversations* will not and should not be satisfied with that answer.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/which-judaism-should-we-teach-our-children-and-when>

Noach – Let’s Speak the Same Language

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shleima for Cholei Yisroel

In the aftermath of the Flood, a movement emerged to deal with G-d. The Dor Haflaga — as the movement is now called — was led by Nimrod, a person who wanted to deny G-d. Nimrod promoted idol worship and held himself as an enemy of Avraham, the man who preached monotheism and founded the Jewish people.

The exact strategy of the Dor Haflaga is a mystery. What we do know is that they were building a gigantic tower that would enable them to reach heaven. Somehow through this tower they intended to deal with G-d. The plan was ambitious and seemed to be proceeding, until G-d intervened and mixed up their languages.

What was remarkable about the Dor Haflaga movement was that they were united. The thousands, perhaps millions, who participated in this ambitious project to fight G-d, were likeminded and spoke the same language. When G-d intervened, He did so by adjusting their languages, creating disunity, because they no longer understood each other.

There are commentaries (Rashi, Baal HaTurim) who understand the story to mean that originally everyone spoke one language: Lashon Hakodesh, the original Hebrew language with which the world was created. According to this approach, when G-d intervened, He introduced the seventy languages, causing the people to disperse and the project to be abandoned.

There is, however, another approach, that of the B'chor Shor and the Chizkuni. These commentaries maintain that G-d did not introduce the seventy languages to disperse the people. Rather, the seventy languages existed as a known wisdom in their times. The unity of the movement was that they understood all languages and perspectives. When G-d intervened, He simply took away their ability to be so great in their communication. Suddenly they were unable to see eye to eye and understand each other. This is what brought their movement to an end.

Uniting different perspectives is a tremendous attribute. Being able to find commonality between interests, as the Dor Haflaga did, is remarkable. Yet, in retrospect, we can question the quality of their unity as it was not really a unity of purpose but rather a unity against G-d. Alliances born of hate and negativity seem strong but lack the ability to endure. [emphasis added]

Rav Gedalia Schorr points out that true unity can be found in our father Avraham. Although Avraham was an individual and did not initially command the following that the Dor Haflaga did, Avraham did hold within himself the capacity to unite people for a higher purpose. Avraham was able to connect with people of all types through his hospitality because his end goal was goodness — he wanted that together we should all thank G-d for the bounty He bestowed.

In fact, in contrast to those who united to distance themselves and fight Heaven, Avraham unified Heaven and earth. He instructed mankind to notice G-d's benevolence and guided those who would listen to a relationship of goodness with G-d and with man. **The unity of the Dor Haflaga really was disunity, and so they were dispersed. The legacy of Avraham is really that of unity and therefore it endured.** [emphasis added]

In our lives, we encounter people who seem to speak “*different languages*” than us. People have different styles, and people may well see the world from different lenses of perspective. For example, in every project or endeavor there are the dreamers who see the vision, and the grounded people who look at budget. There are those who focus on personal relationships and those to whom efficiency is all that matters. The legacy of Avraham is that all perspectives can be harnessed and unified if the focus is a higher good. Torah values enable us to embrace and incorporate the various perspectives. If we are looking to serve G-d, we are all able to speak the same language.

The Dor Haflaga, as a movement, faded into oblivion. But the idea that seventy perspectives can exist and be united by a common cause, lives on. [emphasis added]

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.**

Noach: Set Your Sights

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

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

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

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

The Medrash concludes with a difficult statement:

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

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

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

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

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Noach: The Power of Babble

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the world.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

These questions led the authors of the Midrash to describe the Tower as an act of rebellion against God, and to suggest that some of the builders used the tower as a raised platform to shoot arrows towards heaven, in an attempt to defeat God. That version goes on to say that God played a prank on the shooters and the arrows fell back to earth covered in blood, thus making them believe that they killed, or at least wounded, God.

In Defiance of Totalitarian Regimes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* 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 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 Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation *

The story of the flood appears in virtually every mythology across cultures and religions. While the details differ from one tradition to another, the reason this story is so widespread is likely one of two things: either it's an archetypal story of apocalyptic destruction, or it actually happened. Personally, I believe the latter.

One major difference between belief systems that I find especially important is the distinction between monotheism belief in one God and polytheism.

This brings us to an important discussion topic for this week's "Around the Shabbat Table": Why is it important for both you personally and for humanity as a whole to believe in the divinity of one Creator, as opposed to multiple gods)or no god at all(? How does belief in one God help keep us accountable for our actions?

]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message?]

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah

Noah: Gathering Within the Ark

Why an Ark?

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

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

Rebuilding the World

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

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

The Path of Personal Growth

This same method, Rav Kook wrote, is necessary for our own moral and spiritual growth. Change is difficult. It is not easy to correct old habits and patterns of thought. As human beings, we become accustomed to looking at life in terms of

fulfilling our material needs, which can lead us to drift unthinkingly into self-centered pursuit of honor and physical pleasures.

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

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

A Private Ark

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

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

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

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

Testing the Waters

During the period of confinement, one needs to "*test the waters*" — to measure whether one's powers are ready to be set free. This stage corresponds to Noah's sending out the raven and the dove. One tests one's traits in matters that do not involve danger, just as Noah utilized birds — creatures that can fly and thus were not endangered by the flood waters. When Noah realized that the world's repair was not yet complete, he drew them back into the ark.

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

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/NOAH-69.htm>

Noach: The Courage to Live with Uncertainty (5776, 5783)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Midrash then adds:

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

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

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

Suddenly I understood that **this is a significant part of what faith is in Judaism: to have the courage to pioneer, to**

do something new, to take the road less travelled, to venture out into the unknown. That is what Abraham and Sarah had done when they left their land, their home and their father's house. It is what the Israelites did in the days of Moses when they journeyed forth into the wilderness, guided only by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.]emphasis added[

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is not carte blanche to do whatever we like. Not all innovation is constructive. Some can be very destructive indeed. But this principle of "Walk on ahead", the idea that the Creator wants us, His greatest creation, to be creative, is what

makes Judaism unique in the high value it places on the human person and the human condition.

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

FOOTNOTE:

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[Why do you think Noach waited to be invited to leave the Ark?

]2[Can you suggest some of the great Jewish achievements in history that came from having faith despite uncertainty?

]3[Which do you think takes stronger faith, holding on to all the answers, or having uncertainty but still believing?

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

How Did Noah Stay Calm?

By Aharon Loschak *

"When will I ever catch a break? When will the day arrive that I can go to bed, sleep through the night, wake up in the morning without mishap, and just have a normal day without any crises or misery? When will I get a chance to simply breathe without feeling like my soul is being crushed yet again?"

Do any of these questions sound familiar?

If not, congratulations, you're a hero! But if anything in that rant sounds like something you may have said one day or another, well, then, you need answers.

Noah — yes, the man who survived the flood — will be today's responder.

A Man of Rest?

Parshat Noach tells the dramatic story of the Great Flood, in which G d wiped out most of the world in a deluge that only Noah and his family survived while sailing in the world's largest seacraft.

It's quite a story, with remarkable visuals, but have you ever thought about the name of our Parshah's titular character, Noah? The original Hebrew, Noach, means "rest," which hardly seems like an appropriate name for a man whose life was upended by a flood that submerged the entire world. For someone with a life as tumultuous and earth-shattering as Noah's, his name almost seems like a joke. His life was the furthest thing from restful! How did he wind up with such a wildly off-mark name?

Yes, a Man of Rest

Let's take a moment to think a bit deeper into Noah's life. At the age of 600, G d tells him that in a year's time He is going to destroy the corrupt world He regrets making. Noah has exactly a year to build a ship that will spare his immediate family, and he also has to gather every animal on the globe into his safe haven.

Sure enough, at the designated date, the skies open up and the world is thrown into utter chaos. Everything is obliterated, and Noah is left stranded — literally alone in the world.

We won't go through the rest of the story, but that alone is already more than enough to bring the average person to a frightening mental breakdown — and Noah didn't have a therapist aboard the ark!

So how did Noah survive such a chaotic life? How did he manage to "swim among the sharks" and remain sane?

The answer is that Noah knew a critical thing. He knew that the chaos of his life wasn't just a random experiment wrought by a G d with a cruel sense of humor. He knew that the turbulence and destruction were obviously a means to bring his life to a better place, to make him appreciate new horizons, and to deepen his connection to himself and his Creator.

Noah understood that when G d threw him a literal lifeboat that would enable him to ride the waves of the largest flood to ever visit this world, it wasn't just a boat. He understood that **whenever there are tidal waves in this game we call life, G d provides a lifeboat that enables us not only to survive but to ride the waves and end up on top.**]emphasis added[

And so, yes, Noah was a "restful" man, a person at peace and harmony with himself and his world. Because a feeling of calm and serenity has less to do with the events going on in life, and much more to do with whatever is going on inside your mind, heart, and soul. When you are tethered to a G d who runs the world, you will find the lifeboat to ride out the tsunami of life.

That a man who led arguably the most chaotic life in history was named "rest," teaches us that **rest is something from within — not without.**]emphasis added[

When Life Crushes Your Soul

So when life feels so soul-crushing that you want to scream, "Just leave me alone and give me a moment's rest!" think about Noah. His whole world was washed away into oblivion, yet he was peaceful. He found his ark and rode the wave.

You, too, can find your ark. G d is always there to call upon, and the only question you really need to answer in life is, **"What does G d want from me now?"** As long as whatever you're doing is some sort of answer, you can be at peace and rest well. You're doing what you can, and G d will help you with the rest.]emphasis added[

So many make the mistake that “one day,” they will get somewhere, some place that will finally equal inner peace. They’ll move to this quiet suburb, they’ll send their last kid off to college, or sell off their last time share. As soon as this, that, and the other thing is done, as soon as these items are checked off on their list, they will finally be able to let out a huge sigh of relief. “Ah... now I can relax.”

But of course, what happens next?

We all know the script. As soon as the last item on the checklist is cleared, a new crisis arises; an unexpected curveball comes crashing through your living room window, and you’re anxious all over again. You’re back to screaming at the wind, “Leave me alone!”

That’s the thing. Peace comes from within. You’re G d’s servant and you do what you can to answer His call. That alone should provide you with peace. Your process is great, so worry less about the results.

G d gives each one of us an ark. So go ahead and find it and paddle down the river to serenity.¹

FOOTNOTE:

1. This essay is based on Torah Ohr, Noach 8c-9b.

* Writer, editor, and rabbi; editor of the Jewish Learning Institute’s popular Torah Studies program,

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5673627/jewish/How-Did-Noah-Stay-Calm.htm

Noach: Nature and The Shabbat

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky

As long as the earth lasts, seedtime or harvest, cold or hot seasons, summer or winter, day or night will never cease.)Gen. 8:22(

G-d’s promise gave permanence to creation after the Flood, solidifying the natural order.

This did not mean, however, that G-d confined us irrevocably within the bounds of nature, either physically or spiritually. Rather, He charged His people with the task of infusing nature with transcendent consciousness. To enable them to do this, He gave them the gift of the weekly Sabbath.

Although the world remains in motion on the Sabbath, operating within time and space, through celebrating the Sabbath and observing its laws, we experience transcendence over creation.

We thus effect the synthesis of creation and transcendence by experiencing transcendence within creation.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parashat Noach from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength, victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

L'eilui Nishmat Libka Fayga bat Chanoch, a"n,
on the occasion of her yahrzeit on the 3rd of Cheshvan

Volume 32, Issue 2

Shabbat Parashat Noach

5786 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Individual and Collective Responsibility

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.

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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 Shuruppak, Kish, Uruk, and Ur – Abraham's birthplace – reveal evidence of clay flood deposits. Likewise the Tower of Babel was a historical reality. Herodotus tells of the sacred enclosure of Babylon, at the centre of which was a ziggurat or tower of seven stories, 300 feet high. The remains of more than thirty such towers have been discovered, mainly in lower Mesopotamia, and many references have been found in the literature of the time that speak of such towers "reaching heaven".

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Vegetarians and the Bible

"Every creeping thing that lives shall be for you as food like the vegetation of the herbs have I given you everything." (Genesis 9:3)

What is the Jewish attitude toward vegetarianism? Despite the penchant for meat meals on Sabbaths and festivals, could it possibly be spiritually preferable for us to be eating rice and beans, cauliflower and carrots?

With the creation of Adam, the Almighty enjoins humanity as well as animals to eat only fruits and vegetables. It is only after the flood and the rescue of Noah that God, after blessing him to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, declares that from now on, he is permitted to eat every creeping thing that lives.

I would argue that this permission is actually a concession. It comes in the wake of God's realization 'that the formation (yetzer) of the heart of the human being is evil from his youth, 'God's inescapable conclusion as a result of the perversion and violence that were rampant prior to the flood[1].

This concession to Noah is immediately followed by the command not to eat the limb or drink the blood of a living animal, not to commit suicide and not take human life. In effect, God recognizes that since the urge and ability to destroy has proven itself to be such a basic element of the human personality, let it be expressed in the taking of animal life and not in the destruction of humans.

When viewed from this perspective, our laws of kashrut serve as a limitation to our meat consumption and as a reminder of the basic moral ambiguity involved in eating meat altogether. Many animals, fowl, and fish are completely forbidden, and those that are permitted must be slaughtered in a particular and far more spiritual and humane fashion than the manner in which animals are generally killed throughout the world.

Indeed, the laws of kashrut as expressed within the Bible are certainly related to heightening our sensitivity toward the animal world. It is mostly the carnivorous animals and the birds of prey which are forbidden. Moreover, blood consumption is forbidden. Even the permissible meat must be salted and soaked in order to remove as much blood as possible, for 'blood is life. 'Finally, meat and milk cannot be eaten together, with the Polish Ashkenazi custom enjoining as much as a six-hour wait between eating meat (even fowl) and dairy, since 'thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk '[Ex. 34:26] is apparently a plea for compassion and sensitivity extending to the animal world.

Likutei Divrei Torah

The first chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, even sees the Torah as issuing a hidden rebuke to the meat eater. He first explains (in accordance with the interpretation of Nahmanides) that when the Jews were still in the desert, and the Sanctuary (site of the sacrifices) was literally in the midst of the people, the only meat allowed to be eaten was the meat of the sacrifices. Obviously, this limited meat intake. It was only after they left the desert, with many Israelites living far from the Sanctuary, that they would be allowed to eat non-sacrificial meat, but then only in accordance with the limitation of the laws of kashrut[2].

Rabbi Kook further explains that within the very words of the Bible lies a hidden admonition:

"When the Lord your God will expand your borders...and you shall say 'I will eat meat ' because your soul lusts to eat meat..."

It is only because of the 'lust 'for meat – not a very complimentary description – that God allowed the Israelites to eat meat. Ultimately, Rabbi Kook argues, in the future period of the Third Temple, we shall return to the original vegetarian ideal and then the only Temple sacrifice will be the vegetarian grain mincha offering.

In explaining animal sacrifices in general, Rabbi Kook maintains that the animal world receives its tikkun (perfection) by being brought to God's altar since, being devoid of reason, the animals cannot be uplifted except through an act done to them. In the future, however, when 'knowledge of the Lord will fill the world as the waters cover the seas '[Is. 11:9), an abundance of knowledge will spread and extend even to animal life. And since our prophets teach us that during the messianic age there will be 'no evil or destruction in all of My holy mountain '[Ibid.], it is inconceivable that animal life will be destroyed to serve the divine. At that time, God will 'find the meal offering and vegetable offerings of Judah and Jerusalem sweet '[Malakhi 3:34].

A similar notion is to be found in the writings of Rabbi Haim David Halevi. He maintains – and cites Rabbi Kook as his proof text – that it will only be the first stage of the messianic era that will include animal sacrifices in the Third Temple, since in the first messianic stage the world will be operating as it is now, including sinfulness and the need to atone; however, once the messianic era reaches its spiritual climax of universal repentance, then animal sacrifices will be a mere memory of an earlier and more primitive period. After all, he writes, if there is no sin, what need will there be of animal sacrifice for atonement?

Rabbi Halevi concludes that in the Third Temple period the divine Presence will be revealed in all of its splendor and glory, and there will be no sacrifices other than the non-animal *minha* offering comprised of meal and oil.

There is a beautiful custom to cover the challah knife while reciting the Grace after Meals in order to highlight our revulsion for an implement that could be used to kill and destroy. May the time soon arrive when our swords will turn into ploughshares and our spears into pruning forks, when there will be no evil or destruction throughout the world, and the only use of knives will be for slicing the challah to be eaten with milk and honey – not meat – in honor of Sabbath and festivals.

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

Nimrod and the Psychology of Evil

Why did I choose the title “Person in the Parsha” when I began to compose these weekly columns many years ago? I hesitate to tell you the truth; namely, that I had several reasons for doing so. But one reason was the fact that almost every parsha has in it a central human figure, Abraham or Moses for example, and often several such figures. Surely, a weekly column must include some comment about that person’s heroic achievements or occasional frustrations.

Often, however, we find names of people of whom we know very little, and at times next to nothing. Surely, the author of a weekly parsha column must bring the existence, and significance, of such people to the attention of his or her readers.

In writing this week’s column, I decided to focus on one such individual, Nimrod. Here is what the Torah tells us about him:

Kush (the son of Cham) begot Nimrod, who was the first to be a man of might on earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; hence the saying, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.” The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon, Erach, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From that land he (Nimrod, according to Ramban and others) went forth to Ashur and built Nineveh... (Genesis 10:8-11)

Was Nimrod a “bad guy” or a “good guy”? The simple reading of the text gives us nary a clue about whether he was “good” or “evil”. Yet even a cursory study of the rabbinic sources yields the picture of an ambitious and self-aggrandizing tyrant. Even the two phrases “before the Lord” are understood by our sages as testifying to either his arrogance or to his hypocritical and blasphemous relationship with the divine.

As Rashi puts it: “He recognized his Master (i.e. the Lord) but intentionally rebelled against Him.” Thus, Don Isaac Abarbanel, who knew a thing or two about palace politics, portrays Nimrod as the first human being to challenge the equality of all mankind and to relegate for himself the role of an egomaniacal autocrat driven by violent ambitions of military conquest.

And yet, his outer behavior, his persona, was “before the Lord”. He played the role of a devout believer in the One Above and successfully convinced others that this façade was the “real” Nimrod. We may conjecture that, in his mind, even the Lord himself was deceived by his prayers and religious rituals as he “knew his Master but intended to rebel against Him”.

We may conclude that Nimrod was evil, but in a complex and self-contradictory way. For most of us, he remains difficult, perhaps even impossible, to comprehend!

This brings us to the tantalizing question, “What is the nature of Evil?” Are all villains as psychologically complex as Nimrod? Does one size fit all the Hamans and Hitlers of our tragic history? Or do they somehow differ from each other in an inscrutable but equally diabolical manner?

These are questions to which I intend to return as we proceed together through the ensuing chapters of the Chumash this year. I’ve begun with Nimrod, but for a broader view let’s return to the Torah portions we read last week, Parashat Bereshit, and the preceding Shabbat during Sukkot when we read the Book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) in the synagogue.

First, the following reflection of King Solomon, whom our Sages identified as the author of the tantalizing and fascinating Book of Kohelet. Let’s see what he had to say about evil and, more importantly, about the relationship between good and evil:

Behold the Lord’s doing! Who can straighten what He has twisted? In an instance of “good”, join it; and in an instance of “evil”, reflect: the Lord arranged them as parallel to each other...” (Kohelet 7:13-14, my translation).

Zeh le’umat zeh! “Good” and “Evil” are, in some manner, “parallel to each other”. I take that to mean that just as “evil” people are composed of mixed motivations and mixed behaviors in keeping with their individual psyches, so are “good” people complex to the extent that no two of them are exactly like each other.

Likutei Divrei Torah

For another emphatic “coupling” of “good” and “evil” let’s flip back a few pages in our Chumash to last week’s Torah portion, Bereshit. There we find the following powerful words:

The Lord took Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden... And the Lord commanded Adam, saying, “Of every tree in the garden you may eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat. For as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” (Genesis 2:15-17).

Note! One tree with both “good” and “evil” components. There are many conclusions to draw from the curious juxtaposition of two opposites in one tree. One plausible interpretation is that there is often, if not always, no evil without some good in it, and no good without a dose of evil within.

But I prefer to interpret the presence of both good and evil in the tree as support for my contention that the psychological composition of good and evil people is complex as both are products of mixed motives and contrary dispositions.

Our task is to better understand the differing components of both the “good” and the “evil” within each of us. One approach to this task is offered by Rabbi Yakov Loberbaum, the nineteenth century Torah scholar known for his many Talmudic works such as *Netivot HaMishpat*, who writes in his commentary on Chumash, *Nachalat Yakov*:

There are two types of sinners: a) the one who sins because of his uncontrollable personal passions, and (b) the other who sins to defy his Maker even with no personal material benefit.

How eloquently Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook expresses his view of the source of evil in his *Orot HaTeshuvah* (8:4):

What is the reason for the rage evinced by evil doers? What is the meaning of their anger with the whole world, what is the basis for the bitter melancholy that consumes spirit and flesh, that poisons life, that is found among them?... With clear inner certainty we reply to this: All this stems from the source of evil, “from the wicked For Rav Kook, there is evil deep within all of us, but our free will can suppress it. “When the will refuses to leave evil reposing in the depths of the soul, it... disturbs the equitable relationship of the soul with all existence.”

This week, I have focused upon the complexities of evil. I deliberately ignored Noah, the force for good in this week’s Torah portion, Noach. Next week’s Torah portion will give me the opportunity to shift gears to explore the stark contrast between two Biblical

representatives of good—Noah and Abraham. Please join me again for Parshat Lech Lecha as we strive together to suppress evil and attain only that which is “good” in the eyes of others and in the judgement of our Creator.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Definition of Tzadik Tamim

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 51a) interprets the term tzadik tamim that is used to describe Noah 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 Noah was perfect and righteous (*tzadik tamim*) in his generations (plural). The Meshech Chochmah infers that Noah 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), Noah 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: Noah 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 Noah was saved by the Ribono shel Olam. How does such a person feel about himself? “I must be someone very special.” Nonetheless, Noah 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. Noah 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 Noah, ‘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

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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*.

**Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Words produce light. This powerful message emerges at the commencement of Parshat Noah. Hashem commanded Noah 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!

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Finding Rest and Renewal After a Flood Yonat Lemberger

The dove in this week's parsha ultimately found a resting place for the soles of her feet — and we, too, seek rest and repose after the flood we have endured over the past two years.

In these days, as we have all emerged from our own kind of ark, the grim reality of war has, regrettably, brought upon us a new kind of chaos. The life of our nation — and the lives of each of us personally — have been shaken and overturned. We waited and longed for the moment when we could finally reach calm and closure.

And we now ask ourselves: have "the waters indeed abated"?

I have chosen to focus on the symbolism of the dove — not only because her name resembles mine, but also because of Noah's courage in placing his trust in her. It was the dove who would herald for him the end of the flood.

What is it about the dove that made her worthy of this sacred mission, while the raven failed in his?

In Parshat Noach, the dove is sent forth by Noah to see whether the face of the earth had dried after the flood. Noah sends her forth three times:

The first time, she returns, for the earth is still covered with water.

The second time, a week later, she comes back with "an olive leaf in her beak"—a sign that the earth had begun to dry.

The third time, after yet another week, she does not return at all, and Noah understands that the earth is now completely dry and that it is time to leave the ark.

The Torah recounts: "Then he sent forth the dove from him, to see whether the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned to him into the ark, for the waters were still on the face of all the earth; and he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited yet another seven days and again sent forth the dove from the ark. And the dove came to him at eventide, and behold, an olive leaf freshly plucked was in her mouth. So Noah knew that the waters had abated from the earth. Then he waited yet another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore." (Bereishit 8:8-13)

We ask ourselves: why did Noah choose specifically the dove? What does she symbolize for us — especially in our times?

1. The Dove as a Symbol of Hope and Renewal - After the flood, the world lay in ruins. The sending of the dove embodies humanity's search for new life — for land, for renewal, for hope. When Noah sees the dove return with an olive leaf, he understands: life has begun anew.

The dove thus becomes a symbol of faith — the belief that even after devastation, it is possible to rebuild.

"And behold, an olive leaf was plucked in her mouth" — the green leaf stands as a sign of vitality, of renewal, of hope restored.

2. The Dove as a Symbol of Peace - Tradition associates the dove with peace — a symbol that endures to this day as a universal emblem of that ideal.

After the flood, which brought violence, destruction, and death, the dove comes to represent humanity's yearning for a world of

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peace and harmony — both with nature and with one another.

In Bereishit Rabbah (33), it is said: "The dove said: Let my food be bitter as an olive, but be in the hand of the Holy One blessed be He, rather than sweet as honey in the hand of flesh and blood."

The dove chooses freedom and inner peace over dependence and material comfort. Likewise, in Yeshayahu (60:8), the prophet envisions the nations gathering peacefully in Jerusalem, likening them to "doves returning to their dovecotes."

3. The Dove as a Symbol of Purity and Faithfulness - The dove is one of the kosher birds fit for sacrifice, symbolizing purity, loyalty, and domestic devotion — it is known for its steadfast bond with its mate.

Noah first sends the raven — a non-kosher bird that does not return. Then he sends the dove — a pure bird that returns three times.

There is a moral lesson in this: the pure seeks connection, returns, and remains faithful; the impure thinks only of himself.

The dove therefore expresses man's enduring bond with God — his striving to find the way back, even after the storm of the flood.

In Shir HaShirim (2:14) we read: "My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs."

Rashi explains that the dove here symbolizes the people of Israel as they fled from Egypt — Pharaoh's army behind them and the Red Sea before them — yet they did not despair even in that dire moment, crying out to God for deliverance.

Similarly, in Tehillim (56:1), the psalm opens: "For the conductor, upon the distant dove of silence" (yonat elem rechokim) — a poetic image of prayer in exile, of yearning and closeness to God.

4. The Dove as a Call for Renewal and Repair - Noah sends the dove three times, and this very progression reflects a process of repair and growth.

The first time, there was still no solid place to rest. The second, she brings back the first sign of renewal. The third, she finds her home.

So it is with humans: we try again and again and again until we discover our true path in an ever-renewing world.

It is no coincidence that Sefer Yonah — literally, The Book of the Dove — is read on

Yom Kippur, the day of repentance and renewal, for it embodies the spirit of Teshuvah and restoration.

In Shir HaShirim, too, the dove is a symbol of love and devotion.

In Meir Shalev's wonderful novel *A Pigeon and a Boy*, the dove becomes a story of return: the pigeon, one of the heroines of the book, traverses vast distances, driven by her unchanging yearning to return to her nest – hence her English name, "homing pigeon."

So too Yair, the narrator and protagonist, ultimately returns to a simple, grounded home he finds in the valley – far from his failed marriage and opulent life in the city. His return marks a homecoming not only to a place but to himself, and to the love of his youth.

In our own days, as we witness the return of the living hostages – and, at this writing, some of our fallen whose bodies are still being held in captivity – the dove stands once more as a symbol of homecoming – a return to the nest. It is no coincidence that the image of the dove emerges at the close of chaos.

In Parshat Noach, I see the dove as a symbol of hope, faith, peace, and renewal. Like Noach, we too seek rest after the flood we have endured. We await the day when "the waters will subside," when we may return home to mend our society, and live a life of tranquility, faith, and renewed togetherness.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Noach's Multigenerational Persona

Parshat Noach chronicles the transition between two worlds - the era of creation and the refashioned post-mabul epoch. The need to reiterate and somewhat reformulate man's charge to populate the world and to exercise sovereignty and jurisdiction over it (Bereshit 6:9) in the aftermath of the mabul underscores the scope and significance of this refashioning. The changed parameters of man's relationship with the animal kingdom reflected also in his dietary norms reinforces this conclusion that the post-mabul history constitutes a different world, notwithstanding important dimensions of continuity that also prevailed. (See Parshas Noach: A New Creation?).

Noach did not simply preside over and facilitate these changes, but also significantly shaped this transition. The fact that the Torah employs the plural "bedorotav" (Bereshit 6:9 - "Noach ish tzaddik, tamim hayah bedorotav"), to depict his persona perhaps attests to his singular character and particularly authenticates his qualifications to oversee and to serve as the architect of this crucial development. Ibn Ezra comments: "ve-taam

be-dorotav: bedoro be-eit ha-mabul, ubedorot shehayhu acharav", Noach was a multigenerational figure, someone who spanned and bridged generations, indeed worlds. This quality that signifies and tests consistency is impressive in its own right. Meshech Chochmah (based on Avoda Zara 6a - "tamim bederachav; tzaddik bemaasav") further posits that Noach's diverse qualities impacted each epoch differently. Before the mabul, he personified righteousness in a corrupt society; in the newly fashioned world, he was perceived as the exemplar of humility. Thus, Noach's credentials were extensive, and he possessed the wisdom, character, and capacity to deploy his values and to adapt his focus to address the spiritual challenges of the age. Undoubtedly, this also qualified his association with the seven core laws that define minimum human spirituality, known as the seven Noachide laws, though most preceded his actual involvement.

Yet, despite his admirable consistency and versatility, Noach was evidently not fully integrated into or emblematic of the new order. As noted by some of the parshanim on Avot and others, while Adam and Noach are both included in the list of ten generations from Adam to Noach (Avot 5:2), Noach is excluded from the parallel ten-generation list from Noach to Avraham, though explicitly defining the range! Some (see Chidushei ha-Grim, Bereishit 11:26) have suggested that the Torah itself subtly hints at Noach's primary identification with the pre-mabul world. Seforno (Bereishit 11:11) notes that the Torah subtly changes the manner in which it lists the generations before and after the mabul. Prior to the mabul, the Torah (Bereishit 5:3-35 - Adam till Lemech) consistently focuses initially on the age in which the primary heir was born, and subsequently counts the remaining years of a generational representative, also alluding to his other progeny - "vayoled banim u-banot", and finally his total lifespan, concluding tersely with a statement of his death - "vayamot", as if these data points, by chronicling the quantitative continuity of the period, capture the significance of the generational representative. Following the mabul, typically the Torah alters its generational census (beginning with Sheim-Bereishit 11:10-32) by bypassing the final age and by omitting the terse, self-evident- "vayamot", that perhaps convey a less dynamic continuity and a restricted cumulative impact. [The treatment of Terah differs due to the narrative need to introduce his broader family. His full age and the notice of his demise are explicated several pesukim later - "vayihyu yemei Terach hamesh shanim u-matayim shanah; vayamat Terach be-Haran"- albeit in a form that also differs from pre-mabul census. The emphasis on his age and where he died are viewed by Chazal and the mefarshim as significant to the

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relationship with and background of Avraham. See, for example, Rashi, Seforno, and Radak 11:32.] [The final accounts of the avot and imahot are more extensive and highlight the singular quality of their lives, as well as their ongoing legacy notwithstanding their demise. See, for example, Bereishit 23:1-2, 25:7-8, 25:17 etc. Sarah's death is elaborated in some detail, and is integrated with Avraham's hesped and ultimately with the acquisition of mearat ha-machpelah. Avraham's death notice - "vayigva vayamot be-seivah tovah, va-yeasef el amav" particularly communicates his accomplishments, his unique life, and his enormous legacy. I hope to elaborate on this theme with respect to the obituaries of the other seminal preeminent spiritual figures elsewhere.] Seforno accounts for the differences in presentation by attributing them to the very different frames of reference. The earliest census focused on that which preceded (and contributed) to the mabul - "ki heim kulam meitu kodem shehayah inyan ha-sipur hamechuvan az, vehu hamabul", while the subsequent list emphasizes a more meaningful and flourishing existence in a spiritually more aspirational world that would be defined by the colossal impact of Avraham Avinu- "aval heim hayu kulam chayim bezeman shehitchil inyan hasipur hamechuvan vehu hishtadlut Avraham Avinu...ulemascham beavotot ahvat chesed leavdo shechem echad". Perhaps, as noted, while the mabul era accentuates the dry and doomed history of prominent personalities that preceded the catastrophic end of a corrupt and failed world, the more cumulative and less morbid post-mabul count emphasizes only the dynamism of life, perhaps also implying a progression toward the Avraham Avinu ideal. In any case, it is particularly striking that the Torah's presentation of Noach's obituary (Bereishit 9:28-29)- "vayehi Noach achar hamabul shalosh meot shanah vechamishim shanah' vayihyu kol yemei Noach tesha meot shanah vechamishim shanah, vayamot" - mostly conforms to the pattern of the pre-mabul census! Chidushei ha-Grim suggests that this intriguing affinity underpins Noach's exclusion from the Avot chronicle of post-mabul generations till Avraham. [Seforno does not address this anomaly. The Chidushei ha-Grim acknowledges that he is puzzled by this conclusion.]

We may propose that while Noach lived in both eras, indeed, he was the indispensable bridge between them, he did not extricate himself completely from his origins and fully integrate into and embrace the potential of what was destined to be Avraham's world. In previous presentations (Rav Rosensweig on parsha), I have argued that Noach did not merely oversee the bridging of the worlds; he was an inherently transitional persona. His immense contribution was manifest in his capacity to survive and adapt, thereby enabling

continuity, but he did not epitomize the principled ideals of a visionary world view, or a builder of worlds. Chazal, commenting on "tamim hayah bedorotav", debate ("yesh dorshin leshevach, veyeish dorshim legenai") Noach's spiritual stature with reference to the impact living in Avraham Avinu's world may have had. The common denominator of their opposing views, however, is that Noach's prominence was relative, dictated by the impact- in one direction or the other- of the surrounding social milieu. In sharp contrast, Avraham was labeled "ha-ivri" because of his tenacity (kol haolam beiver ehad vehu beiver acher), he was entrusted with and introduced by the ultimate cultural challenge of "lech lecha", and was the architect of a transformative movement that would establish Hashem as both Elokei ha-shamayim and Elokei ha-aretz. Avraham was the archetype of an idealistic religious personality who shaped his environment but was inured to social pressures. Noach's admirable persona is more qualified. Chazal perceive that, notwithstanding his temimut and zidkut in each and both epochs in which he lived, his belief and commitment could be reticent and hesitant. Occasionally he was "miketanei emunah", incomplete in the purity and absoluteness of his faith. At crucial junctures, he could sometimes lack spiritual initiative, a prerequisite for a more spiritually aspirational movement and world. [See Bereishit 8:16, 17- "tzei min ha-tevah" and the keri of "chayzei" according to various mefarshim ad loc.] His questionable conduct in the aftermath of the brit (Bereshit 9:9-17) symbolizing a new world foundation (9:20-21 "vayachel Noach ish haadamah vayita karem"...) confirms his limitations that one suspects are an undesirable throwback to his origins. In this one respect, his otherwise incredibly admirable "bedorotav" persona betrayed a flaw, an obstacle to the kind of religious leadership required for a new world foundation. Thus, he is ultimately located in the mishneh Avot lists as a pre-mabul persona exclusively. The record of his death in terms reminiscent of that previous epoch does not diminish his instrumental role in enabling a refashioned world.

Avraham Avinu alone emerged as the single focal point of the new epoch that was characterized not by Noach's initiation, but by Avraham's attainment and his dedicated program. His idealism, spiritual consistency, and religious loyalty qualified him as the exclusive exemplar of a new world order, notwithstanding the indispensable transition that was orchestrated and enabled only by Noach. Rav Hayyim Volozhiner (Ruah Hayyim, Avot 5:3, the mishneh that immediately follows the chronicling of generations previously discussed), commenting on the subtle addition of the word "avinu" in the mishneh in Avot that

enumerates the ten trials (nisyonot) that personified Avraham's spiritual odyssey and his singular commitment to Hashem, explains that Avraham's intense internalization of halachic values and his absolute dedication to avodat Hashem so defined his persona that they became the equivalent to spiritual DNA, that he transmitted, even implanted as a legacy for his descendants for all generations. [See Rambam, Hilchos Matnot Aniyim, 10:1-3.] The contrast to Noach, despite and because of his multigenerational - "bedorotav" status is self-evident.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Whole World Was Created

And HASHEM saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil all the time. And HASHEM regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became grieved in His heart. And HASHEM said, "I will blot out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the earth, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them." But Noach found favor in the eyes of HASHEM. (Breishis 6:5-8)

There were ten generations from Adam to Noach, in order to make known how patient is HASHEM; for all those generations kept on provoking HIM, until HE brought upon them the waters of the flood. There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham, in order to make known how patient is HASHEM; for all those generations kept on provoking HIM, until Avraham, came and received the reward of all of them. (Pirke Avos 5:20)

There is a very important and fundamental lesson to be learned from Noach. The entire world is worthy of being saved just because of one person.

The Mishne in Sanhedrin explains how they would frighten witnesses who are giving testimony that might spell death for the one being testified about, "Chayav Adam lomar, bishvili nivra haolam" "Every person has an obligation to say, "The whole world was created for me!" If one person is eliminated then it is considered as if a whole world has been destroyed. That is the value of an individual!

This is spelled out as an "obligation" for every person. When is one required to make this declaration? Isn't this awfully risky for anybody to say. It sounds like it could be abused by haughty and self-centered individuals. It may even begin to promote narcissism if misunderstood. That can't be and that can't be tolerated. Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men states in Mishlei, "To'eives HASHEM call gava lev" – "It is disgusting to

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HASHEM any haughtiness of the heart". So, what does it mean and when is it applicable!?

It is fascinating that the Talmud Brochos 58A (If you want to remember where 58 is the numerical value NOACH) employs the term BISHVILI as in "FOR ME". It asks, "What does a good guest say? "How much effort did the host exert "FOR ME". How much meat he brought before me?! How much wine he placed before me?! How many loaves of bread did he put before me?! And all that effort he only exerted FOR ME!" However, a bad guest, what does he say? What effort did this host make?! I only ate one slice of bread! I only drank one cup! All of the exertion that this host expended was for his wife and kids!

Is the Gemara telling us only about the mindset of a Shabbos guest? We cannot hear them actually saying these things. This is an internal memo, a thought that they "say" to themselves. So, what's the point? Maybe the Talmud is coaching us on how to be good guests. That might work. Yet, not everybody has that regular opportunity to be a guest by someone else. Again, what's the larger point? The Talmud is asking "What does a good guest in this world say? The one who declares that that whole world was created for me, is a much more grateful person than the one who suddenly hides in the crowd and says "I only ate a small amount, so what do I owe?!"

During Sukkos in Hallel we repeated the words of Dovid HaMelech, "MAH ASHIV L'HASHEM KOL TAGMELOHI ALAI" – "How can I repay HASHEM for ALL that HE has granted to me?!" The Alter from Kelm explained that if someone has internalized the notion that "the whole world was created for me", then he owes endless gratitude not just for what he consumed and benefited from but also for "ALL"- The WHOLE WORLD, from the beginning until the end of history!

These two guests are having completely different experiences while walking on the same planet. One's heart is brimming like a fountain with constant gratitude. The other is continuously complaining. It has been said that, "It is not that happy people are more grateful but rather that grateful people are happier." So, our job is to be that person for whom the whole world was created.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

The Infinite Value of Human Life

Everybody in the generation of the flood had lost their way and was corrupt, but what was the root of this corruption? How could a society become so corrupt that everyone needed to be destroyed? It was due to one word, a word we have all come to know in our generation as the epitome of evil: "hamas".

It says twice in the beginning of the parasha that the world was full with “hamas” – if it exists in the world, it must be destroyed. What is “hamas”? It is used synonymously with the worst human sins, and most commentators say it is specifically stealing. Stealing is terrible, and even if everybody is stealing it is terrible, but is it the worst possible thing that requires society to be destroyed?

The ancient commentator Onkelos says that it means “hostage-takers”. When society is dedicated not only to stealing property, but stealing people; when life is so devoid of sanctity that you can walk into a person’s home or field, into their bedrooms, take children from their cots and steal people – that is the worst iniquity, and when society supports it then that society no longer has a *raison d’être*. When you develop a systematic perversion that you can and will steal people, from the youngest child to octogenarians, the regime has no right to exist.

So many people ignorantly or perversely make a moral equivalence which is of the worst kind – between Israel, who is trying to bring its hostages back and defeat this enemy, and those who systematically and intentionally steal babies and hold them hostage in horrific conditions to trade in them. Just as then the society of hostage-taking was destroyed, Israel is committed to do everything it can to bring its hostages back and destroy this evil regime, so that the world should always know the infinite value and sacredness of human life.



BS"D

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Parshas Noach

Keep on Growing!

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1353 – Uniqueness of the Hebrew Language Good Shabbos!

In connection with Migdal Bavel, the pasuk says that from among the nations of the world who existed at that time "...Ashur departed and built (his own cities)..." (Bereshis 10:11). The Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Noach explains that Ashur left the Migdal Bavel building project because he opposed their plan. Once he saw that the intention was to wage war against the Ribono shel Olam, Ashur said "I don't want any part of this." So, he left his homeland. The Medrash says that the Ribono shel Olam commented to Ashur, "You left these other four people because you didn't want to do battle with Me, I swear that I will reward you and give you four (cities)." Concerning this, the pasuk notes that Ashur built "Ninveh, Rechovos Ir, Kalach, and Resen" (Bereshis 10:11-12).

The Chizkuni quotes a Medrash that says that Ashur's zechus (merit) lasted for hundreds of years. We know from Sefer Yona that Ninveh became a corrupt and terrible city, where theft and violence were rampant. The city was deserving of destruction and indeed it had been decreed that they should suffer Divine punishment. And yet, the Ribono shel Olam sent them a Jewish navi (prophet) to urge the population to repent and avoid this fate. Why did this city deserve such treatment? The Chizkuni says in the name of the Medrash that it was in the zechus of their founding father, Ashur, from hundreds of years earlier.

(As an aside, the city of Ninveh became familiar to the world in recent times. The city of Mosul in Iraq is the ancient city of Ninveh. It is located in a province that is still named Ninveh to this very day. This city was originally built by this fellow Ashur, who is mentioned at the end of this week's parsha. Ashur did this brave and heroic act of refusing to participate in the building of Migdal Bavel.)

As a result of Yonah's message to the people of Ninveh, the city did teshuva (repentance). The Yalkut Shimoni in Sefer Yonah writes that their teshuva was so overwhelming that not only did they cease to engage in

theft and corruption, but from that point forward, they even made great efforts to return lost objects to their original owners. They went far beyond the letter of the law to make amends for past actions in their return of all stolen property.

From where did such a strong spiritual reaction come? It came from Ashur! However, the Medrash then continues that ultimately the nation of Ashur (Assyria) did not remain so righteous. Later on in history, Ashur's descendants ganged up on Klal Yisrael. "Even Assyria joined with them, they became the strong arm of Lot's sons, Selah." (Tehillim 83:9). This same nation of Ashur, whose great-great-grandfather departed from the others who were planning to build Migdal Bavel, later, "went off the derech" and sided with the people who wanted to destroy Klal Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

The Medrash comments on this: "Esmol efroach, v'ha'yom beitzta" (Yesterday you were a baby chick and today you are an egg). What does that mean? A talmid of Rav Aryeh Leib Bakst (1915-2003), the Rosh Yeshiva, z"l, of Detroit, wrote a sefer in which he explains that this statement is telling Ashur that they regressed. At one time you were a distinguished individual who acted heroically; but look what happened to you! Previously, you were a living entity (a chick); now you are just an inanimate object (an egg). Rav Aryeh Leib Bakst points out that regression is one of the worst things that can happen to a human being. A human being must always keep on growing.

As we get older, it is harder and harder to grow. Typically, we stagnate, which is arguably the equivalent to going the other way. We were put on this earth to grow, not to stagnate and decline. The author wrote something that Rav Bakst once told him that Rav Chaim Ozer said about the Chofetz Chaim.

Rav Chaim Ozer visited the Chofetz Chaim when the latter was already an old man. Rav Chaim commented "This old one, I don't recognize him from when I saw him last year. How much he has grown!" The Chofetz Chaim, at this time, was in his late eighties or early nineties. When someone sends away his ninth grader to Yeshiva and the son comes back six months later, it is understandable to be able to marvel "Look how much he has matured; look how much he has grown in his Torah learning!" That is all fine for someone who is in his teens or twenties. But when someone reaches his fifties, sixties, seventies, and beyond, continued growth becomes a challenging task. It is not easy to keep on growing and surpassing our — by then — considerable accomplishments from year to year. However, that is our goal — to keep on growing, despite our age.

Noach Found "Chein" in the Eyes of Hashem

The Ohr Hachaim points out (as do others) that Noach was not saved based on his good deeds. Even though the Torah says about Noach, "Tzadik tamim b'dorosav; es ha-Elokim his'halech Noach" (completely righteous; walking with Hashem), that would not have been enough to save him. What did save him? chenNoach was saved because "Noach matza chein b'einei Hashem" (Noach found "grace" in the eyes of Hashem).

There is something called "chein," which is an attribute with which the Ribono shel Olam gifts people. Chein is often translated as "grace," but that is a very inadequate definition. Whatever it is, "chein" saved Noach. Rav Chatzkel Levenstein once said that if we look back at what happened during the Holocaust – there were totally righteous individuals, kedoshim, who did not survive. That is because when the Ribono shel Olam brings such a plague to the world, He does not distinguish between a tzadik and a rasha. Likewise, righteousness alone would not have saved the day for Noach. His special "chein" did the trick.

This week, I noticed a sefer containing a collection of shmoozin from Rav Elya Svei, zt"l. He writes of the incredible power of a person who possesses the attribute of "chein." Chein serves as a protective shield. He quotes a very interesting teaching of the Chasam Sofer. The Chasam Sofer asks how could it be that Dena, the daughter of Yaakov Avinu, was violated by Shechem? How did such a thing happen in such a family? Chazal say in Bereshis Rabbah that the reason it happened to Dena is because when Yaakov met Eisav (at the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach), he didn't want Eisav to look at Dena, so Yaakov hid her in a box.

According to the Medrash, that is the reason that this happened to Dena. The question is, was it wrong to hide Dena? Why would the act of hiding her cause what happened? The Chasam Sofer says an incredible thing: When Eisav met Yaakov and asked, "Who are all these children?" Yaakov responded, "The children, asher chanan Elokim es avdecha" (these are the children with whom Elokim blessed me) (Bereshis 33:5). The Chasam Sofer says that all the children who were standing there at that moment were blessed with the blessing of "chein." But Dena was in the box, so she never merited this bracha of chein. Therefore, Dena was left unprotected. Noach was protected because he had the attribute of "chein." Dena did not have that attribute, so she remained unprotected from danger.

The pasuk says about Yosef Hatzadik in the dungeon that Hashem granted him chein in the eyes of the officer of the dungeon. (Bereshis 39:21) Chein protects. A lack of chein is a lack of protection. Chein can even save a person from horrific and terrible tragedies.

So how is a person zoche to chein? Rav Elya Svei says there is a pasuk that says how a person is zoche to chein. The pasuk says: "Chein will be given to the humble." (Mishlei 3:34). Chein is a gift from the Ribono shel Olam that is given to those who are modest. That doesn't mean that everyone who is humble will automatically be zoche to chein. Modesty is a prerequisite, but there is no guarantee. However, people who are not humble will never be zoche to the incredible bracha of chein.

Rav Elya .quotes the same idea from the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish said that while it is true that Hakadosh Boruch Hu is the one who makes zivugim (matches), how do the couples figure out when a prospective match is the right shidduch for them? The Chazon Ish says that the key is chein. Hashem causes the chosson to sense the attribute of chein in his kallah, and causes the kallah to sense the attribute of chein in her chosson. When the couple feels in one another that mutual sense of "chein," they know that it is a good shidduch.

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TIMELINE OF NOACH AND THE MABUL

Collected by me from various sources by me – so send comments to Chaim Shulman cshulman@gmail.com

The timeline of Noach includes his birth at the beginning of his life, the 120 years he spent building the teivah, and the Mabul which began when he was 600 years old. The flood lasted for one year (about 370 days), and he died at 950 years old, 350 years after the flood ended.

Noach's life and the Great Flood.

1. Building the teivah: God commanded Noach at age 480 to build the teivah, and he spent 120 years doing so while also preaching for repentance.
2. Noach had Yafes Cham and Shem beginning at age 500 so they would be less than 100 bar onesh at time of mabul or to avoid needing multiple Teivas for the family. (Rashi)
3. The flood begins when Noach was 600 years old. The flood began, according to many in 1656 from Creation or 2105 BCE. The flood lasted 370 days according to Rashi.
4. Cheshvan 17 (mid-fall): Noach enters the teivah; the 40 days of rain begin. (This is view of Rabi Eliezer. But Rabi Yehoshua has flood starting in 17 Iyar second month of Jewish year. RH 11b.)
5. Kislev 27 (early winter): The 40 days of rain end; the waters begin to swell and surge for 150 days.
6. Sivan 1 (early summer): The waters begin to recede.
7. Sivan 17: The teivah lands on the mountains of Ararat.
8. Av 1 (summer): The mountain peaks breakthrough the water's surface.
9. Elul 10 (late summer): Forty days after the mountains become visible, Noach sends out a raven.
10. Elul 17: Noach sends out a dove for the first time.

11. Elul 23: The dove is sent out a second time and returns with an olive leaf.

12. Tishrei 1 (early fall): The dove is sent for the third time and does not return, signaling the earth is dry.

13. Cheshvan 27: The ground is completely dry, and Noach exits the teivah.

14. Noach's death: Noach lived for 350 more years after the flood, dying at the age of 950.

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Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha

Noach

The rabbis were not so much critical of Noach – as he is paid the highest of compliments, throughout the Torah as a righteous person – but they were wary of him. I have often felt that this attitude is born of the idea that Rashi himself states in commenting upon the origin of Noach's name. Rashi makes a point that the name Noach should not be construed as a derivative of the Hebrew word "nacheim" – meaning to comfort – but rather it is derived from the other Hebrew word "noach" – meaning, rest, leisure, comfortable but not comfort as in consolation.

Rashi attributes this understanding of Noach's name to the fact that he was the father, so to speak, of modern agricultural technological advancement and progress. The iron plow, the first great essential tool for farming developed for humans, enabling settlers to abandon a nomadic existence, was an invention of Noach. This was his great contribution towards the advancement of human technology.

Noach therefore becomes the source of human technological progress which grants us leisure, eases our physical workload and gives us many physical comforts in life. However, technology alone with all of its attendant blessings does not guarantee us any sort of mental, spiritual or social comfort. It does not console us in our hour of grief nor does it strengthen our spirit in our moments of self-doubt and personal angst.

If Noach could have achieved these goals then Rashi points out that his name would have been Menachem – the one who brings true consolation and comfort to troubled souls. Hence Noach is viewed in tradition as being incomplete – technologically advanced but spiritually wanting – in short a pretty accurate description of our current human society.

The Rabbis of the Talmud taught us that if "one tells you that there is wisdom, knowledge and skills present amongst the nations of the world you should believe him." However, if one tells you that there is Torah amongst the nations of the world, then do not believe him." Judaism and Jewish society has no basic argument against the advance of technology. We are not the Amish nor are we willing to be consigned a back seat in the drive to physically improve the human condition of life on this planet. Yet Judaism realizes that true psychological and spiritual comfort cannot be found in the latest version of the ipod.

Noach's technology can be enormously beneficial in a society that adopts Avraham's values and beliefs. But bereft of any spiritual focus or restraint, technology run wild makes our world a more fearful place to inhabit and forces many to yearn for the good old, less technologically advanced, eras that preceded us. Noach's grand technology could not save the world from the ravages of evil that brought upon humankind the great flood described in this week's parsha.

Avraham's grand values and holy behavior almost saved the seat of world evil, Sodom. The world is Noach's world but its survival is dependent upon the survival and eventual triumph of Avraham's children, ideas and beliefs.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

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Noach - True Morality **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Is there such a thing as an objective basis of morality? For some time, in secular circles, the idea has seemed absurd. Morality is what we choose it to be. We are free to do what we like so long as we don't harm others.

Moral judgments are not truths but choices. There is no way of getting from "is" to "ought", from description to prescription, from facts to values, from science to ethics. This was the received wisdom in philosophy for a century after Nietzsche had argued for the abandonment of morality – which he saw as the product of Judaism – in favour of the "will to power".

Recently, however, an entirely new scientific basis has been given to morality from two surprising directions: neo-Darwinism and the branch of mathematics known as Games Theory. As we will see, the discovery is intimately related to the story of Noah and the covenant made between God and humanity after the Flood.

Games theory was invented by one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century, John von Neumann (1903-1957). He realised that the mathematical models used in economics were unrealistic and did not mirror the way decisions are made in the real world. Rational choice is not simply a matter of weighing alternatives and deciding between them. The reason is that the outcome of our decision often depends on how other people react to it, and usually we cannot know this in advance. Games theory, von Neumann's invention in 1944, was an attempt to produce a mathematical representation of choice under conditions of uncertainty. Six years later, it yielded its most famous paradox, known as the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Imagine two people, arrested by the police under suspicion of committing a crime. There is insufficient evidence to convict them on a serious charge; there is only enough to convict them of a lesser offence. The police decide to encourage each to inform against the other. They separate them and make each the following proposal: if you testify against the other suspect, you will go free, and he will be imprisoned for ten years. If he testifies against you, and you stay silent, you will be sentenced to ten years in prison, and he will go free. If you both testify against one another, you will each receive a five-year sentence. If both of you stay silent, you will each be convicted of the lesser charge and face a one-year sentence.

It doesn't take long to work out that the optimal strategy for each is to inform against the other. The result is that each will be imprisoned for five years. The paradox is that the best outcome would be for both to remain silent. They would then only face one year in prison. The reason that neither will opt for this strategy is that it depends on collaboration. However, since each is unable to know what the other is doing – there is no communication between them – they cannot take the risk of staying silent. The Prisoner's Dilemma is remarkable because it shows that two people, both acting rationally, will produce a result that is bad for both of them. Eventually, a solution was discovered. The reason for the paradox is that the two prisoners find themselves in this situation only once. If it happened repeatedly, they would eventually discover that the best thing to do is to trust one another and co-operate.

In the meantime, biologists were wrestling with a phenomenon that puzzled Darwin. The theory of natural selection – popularly known as the survival of the fittest – suggests that the most ruthless individuals in any population will survive and hand their genes on to the next generation. Yet almost every society ever observed values individuals who are altruistic: who sacrifice their own advantage to help others. There seems to be a direct contradiction between these two facts.

The Prisoner's Dilemma suggested an answer. Individual self-interest often produces bad results. Any group which learns to cooperate, instead of compete, will be at an advantage relative to others. But, as the Prisoner's Dilemma showed, this needs repeated encounters – the so-called "Iterated (= repeated) Prisoner's dilemma". In the late 1970s, a competition was announced to find the computer program that did best at playing the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma against itself and other opponents.

The winning programme was devised by a Canadian, Anatole Rapoport, and was called Tit-for-Tat. It was dazzlingly simple: it began by co-operating, and then repeated the last move of its opponent. It worked on the rule of "What you did to me, I will do to you", or "measure for measure".

This was the first time scientific proof had been given for any moral principle.

What is fascinating about this chain of discoveries is that it precisely mirrors the central principle of the covenant God made with Noah:

Whoever sheds the blood of man,

By man shall his blood be shed;

For in the image of God has God made man.

This is measure for measure [in Hebrew, middah keneged middah], or retributive justice: As you do, so shall you be done to. In fact, at this point the Torah does something very subtle. The six words in which the principle is stated are a mirror image of one another: [1] Who sheds [2] the blood [3] of man, [3a] by man [2a] shall his blood [1a] be shed. This is a perfect example of style reflecting substance: what is done to us is a mirror image of what we do. The extraordinary fact is that the first moral principle set out in the Torah is also the first moral principle ever to be scientifically demonstrated. Tit-for-Tat is the computer equivalent of (retributive) justice: Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

The story has a sequel. In 1989, the Polish mathematician Martin Nowak produced a programme that beats Tit-for-Tat. He called it Generous. It overcame one weakness of Tit-for-Tat, namely that when you meet a particularly nasty opponent, you get drawn into a potentially endless and destructive cycle of retaliation, which is bad for both sides. Generous avoided this by randomly but periodically forgetting the last move of its opponent, thus allowing the relationship to begin again. What Nowak had produced, in fact, was a computer simulation of forgiveness.

Once again, the connection with the story of Noah and the Flood is direct. After the Flood, God vowed: "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done." This is the principle of Divine forgiveness.

Thus the two great principles of the Noachide covenant are also the first two principles to have been established by computer simulation. There is an objective basis for morality after all. It rests on two key ideas: justice and forgiveness, or what the Sages called middat ha-din and middat rachamim. Without these, no group can survive in the long run.

In one of the first great works of Jewish philosophy – Sefer Emunot ve-Deot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) – R. Saadia Gaon (882-942) explained that the truths of the Torah could be established by reason. Why then was revelation necessary? Because it takes humanity time to arrive at truth, and there are many slips and pitfalls along the way.

It took more than a thousand years after R. Saadia Gaon for humanity to demonstrate the fundamental moral truths that lie at the basis of God's covenant with humankind: that co-operation is as necessary as competition, that co-operation depends on trust, that trust requires justice, and that justice itself is incomplete without forgiveness. Morality is not simply what we choose it to be. It is part of the basic fabric of the universe, revealed to us by the universe's Creator, long ago.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Noach

Compounded Interest

We all know the story of the flood. The world was bad – very bad. Hashem was enraged. He decided to destroy the whole world except for a tiny righteous family, the Noachs.

But what was the actual bad that did the world in? After all, something had to have gone mighty awry for the Almighty to destroy his handiwork and begin anew.

And so, the Torah tells us, "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 perverse, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. G-d said to Noah, "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” (Genesis 6:11-13).

It seems that there were two main crimes, corruption and robbery. Robbery is self-explanatory, and the commentaries explain corruption as lewdness and licentiousness in addition to idolatry. In fact, it was so bad that “all flesh had corrupted its way”; not only did mankind cavort in adulterous behavior, even cattle, beasts, and fowl did not consort with their own species” (Rashi *ibid.*) But what sealed their fate? There seems to be two defining offenses. The Torah introduces Hashem’s words to Noah with the statement, “And G-d saw the earth and behold it was perverse, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.” Yet what he tells Noah is “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery.” So what was it that brought the Almighty to the fateful decision, robbery or perversion?

Rashi declares in one verse, “wherever you find lewdness and idolatry, punishment of an indiscriminate character comes upon the world, killing good and bad alike.” Yet, later, when the Torah states the sin of robbery, Rashi explains that “their fate was sealed only on account of their sin of robbery.”

How did these two very different evils forge together to force the end of the world? In addition, what lesson can we take from it?

According to the “What It’s Worth” department of a popular news broadcast, this story actually occurred. In the late 1980s a robber walked into a bank in Oceanside, California, with a gun and a note. He strode up to the teller that looked the easiest target a woman in her fifties with a gentle, grandmotherly appearance. He handed her the note that demanded the money. “Give me all your money or I will blow your ... head off” or something to that affect.

She reached for the cash drawer to oblige. Then she looked back down at the note and her teeth clenched. She squeezed her hands into tight fists and turned red. Suddenly, in flash she pulled out the metal drawer entirely. She did not give it to him instead she flung it at him.

The she bashed him over the head with it. She hit him once, and again, and again. She began yelling at him in a rage. The money was flying all over the bank. The patrons ran for cover. The dazed thief retreated in fear. Then he ran. Police nearby caught him hiding under a nearby bush.

And then they figured out what spurred the heroics of the grandmotherly teller. She was chasing him out of the bank screaming, “Don’t you ever use such a foul word again!”

Many commentaries explain a difference between judgment and wrath. They are separate issues. Judgment was meted because of the sin of thievery. But that merits judgment, and payback. Perhaps there could have been repentance. Maybe only certain acts would have been judged. It is strong enough to warrant strict judgment. But to a point. Thievery alone, even wanton brazenness is not enough to destroy a world. Alone, it would not have produced such wrath. But when the desire to gain someone else’s property is compounded with the arrogance of lewd licentiousness, depraved morality, and debasing the norms of civilization, then the judgment is meted with wrath.

Often people sin. They even steal. Those crimes have to be dealt with even judged strongly. But when unprovoked vices become integrated with the selfishness of theft and greed, then a wake-up call is imperative. Even if it can ruin your entire world.

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Rav Kook Torah

Noah: The Beauty of Greece

After the Flood, Noah blessed his son Yefeth:

“May God expand Yefeth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem.” (Gen. 9:27)

What does this blessing mean? Why should Yefeth live in Shem’s tents?

The Sages noted that Yefeth was the ancestor of ancient Greece. As such, Yefeth’s blessing relates to the special accomplishments of the Greeks, especially in the realm of the arts and aesthetics (the name ‘Yefeth’ is

related to the Hebrew word *yofi*, meaning ‘beauty’). As the Talmud states in Megillah 9b: “May the beauty of Yefeth reside in the tents of Shem.”

The blessing links Yefeth and Shem together through the cultures of their descendants, Greece and Israel. Yet the relationship between these two nations was never simple. We know from the story of Chanukah that these two civilizations clashed violently during the Second Temple period. How then can the beauty of Greek culture reside harmoniously in the tents of Israel?

Studying Greek Wisdom

On the one hand, the Sages placed no explicit prohibition against studying Greek philosophy. They were content to give general guidance, such as Rabbi Yishmael’s instruction to his nephew: “Find an hour that is neither day nor night, and study Greek wisdom at that time” (Menachot 99b).

Regarding the education of youth, however, the Sages were more circumspect. They feared that the outward appeal and beauty of Greek wisdom would lure the next generation away from their fathers’ faith. Thus they forcefully declared: “Cursed be the one who teaches his son Greek wisdom” (Baba Kama 82b).

The language of this decree specifically forbids teaching Greek wisdom. In other words, it is permitted to study it, but not to teach it. Young students must first acquire a solid basis in Torah, and only then will they be able to discern the difference between the Torah of Israel and the philosophy of Greece.

Style versus Content

We find that the Talmud makes a second distinction regarding Greek culture. “Greek language is one thing, but Greek wisdom is another” (Baba Kama 83a). The intent of this statement is to differentiate between style and content.

Greek wisdom, as a philosophy and an outlook on life, profoundly detracts from the sacred and defiles the holy. The Greek language, on the other hand, poses no challenge of ideas and beliefs. Greek is a rich and sophisticated language, and is an appropriate vehicle through which to express our thoughts and ideas. The external language does not influence or harm the inner content.

We have no need to borrow from the content of foreign cultures when our own traditions are so rich and stimulating, ennobling both the individual and society as a whole. But we may adopt from other peoples that which adds external beauty and elegance. Even after the culture clash with Hellenism, the Sages still taught that it is fitting to adopt stylistic enhancements — “May the beauty of Yefeth reside in the tents of Shem.”

This approach is not limited to ancient Greece, but is true for all foreign cultures. It is not inappropriate for us to utilize the innovations and talents of other nations. After all, the focus of the Jewish people is primarily on inner matters, on ethical and spiritual advancement.

Even for the construction of the holy Temple, we find that King Solomon turned to Hiram, the king of Tyre, for his workers’ expertise in cutting down and preparing the wood, “for we have none among us who knows how to hew timber like the Zidonians” (I Kings 5:20). Solomon used artisans from other nations to chop the wood and quarry the large stones for the Temple. But after these external preparations, it was the Jewish people who secured the Sanctuary’s inner holiness.

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Thu, Oct 23, 2025 at 6:10 PM

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The Hero for the Simple People: Thank Goodness, Noah Was No Saint

Why Do the Sages Feel Compelled to Denigrate Noah?

By Rabbi YY Jacobson

Dedicated by Doron Keller in honor of all the uplifting teachings on TheYeshiva.net, which are כמים קרים על נפש עיפה

Henry Kissinger’s Suit

There is an old Jewish anecdote about the late former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (who died in Nov. 2023, aged 100), who decides to make for himself a custom-made beautiful three-piece suit of the finest material. During his next trip to Italy, he has himself measured by a world-renown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Debate on Noah's Persona

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Denigrate a Hero?

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

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

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

There are various interpretations. One of my favorite ones was presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in 1964.[6]

Not only were the Rabbis not trying to minimize Noah's virtues; they actually wanted to highlight his praises even more. Equally important, they were trying to teach us all a transformative lesson.

Who Can Change the World?

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

An achievement indeed, if there was ever one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uniform Biographies

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

educational value. How can I try to emulate a flawless and brilliant saint? It is an educational mistake to see spiritual success in the absence of struggle and the repression of authentic emotions. Look at Noah. He was a flawed man, and he saved the world!

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Sanhedrin 108a [2] In the Talmud *ibid.* it's a debate between Rabbi Yochanan (derogatory) and Reish Lakish (complimentary). Rabbi Chanina continues to say: "Rabbi Yochanan's view may be illustrated by the parable of a jar of wine stored in a cellar filled with jars of vinegar. In such a place, the fragrance of the wine is sensed, because of the vinegar's fumes; in any other place, its fragrance might not be sensed. Rabbi Oshaiya said: Resh Lakish's view may be illustrated by a vial of fragrant oil lying amid excrement: if its fragrance is sensed even in such surroundings, how much more so amid spices!" Perhaps we can suggest that these two sages' dispute is connected to their own life story. Rabbi Yochanan was raised in piety and holiness; Reish Lakish was a gangster and gladiator who later became one of the greatest Torah sages of his age (Talmud Bava Metizah 84b). Reish Lakish, remembering his past, and knowing the dark side of human nature and its great potency, teaches that if N ach could succeed in his corrupt generation to live morally, certainly he would have been righteous in a more spiritual generation. Reish Lakish understood the depth of the human struggle against darkness and the enormity of the challenge some people face, and he could only stand in awe of Noah's moral standing in his generation. Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, could not fully appreciate what Noah had to contend against. Yet the questions in this essay are still unanswered. [3] Genesis 6:8 [4] In the Ethics of our Fathers (1:6) we are enjoined to "judge every person favorably," giving them the benefit of the doubt. It is the sages who go so far as to declare that "the Torah is loath to speak negatively even of a non-kosher animal" (Talmud Bava Basra 123a; Pesachim 3a), a lesson derived from this very portion of Noah! If the clause "in his generations" can be understood both ways, why propose a negative interpretation? In the words of the famed Polish-Italian Talmudic sage and commentator the Beer Sheva (Rabbi Yissachar Ber Eilenberg, 1550-1623): " כל ימי הייתי קוהה מאחר שאין לו הכרע אם לגנאי או לשבח" (באר שבע נאמר בדורותיו, א"כ קשה על רבי יוחנן למה משכו נפשו לדורשו לגנאי" (באר שבע א) "All my life I was grinding (my teeth). Since the term "in his generation," can be explained positively or negatively, why did Reb Yochanan's soul compel him to explain it disgracefully?" [5] Genesis 7:1 [6] The Rebbe shared this during a public address ("farbrenge") on Shabbos Parshas Noach 5725, October 10, 1964. Published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 5 pp. 281-283. On another occasion, the Rebbe shared another explanation (Likkutei Sichos vol. 25 Parshas Noach). Briefly: The sages had some independent criticism of Noah for not trying to save his generation (see Zohar Bereishis 66; 107). When they observed the term "in his generation," they understood that this was written to underscore the flaw of Noah. They felt it was important to bring out this flaw not in order to denigrate Noah (especially since in his position he may have done the best he could) but to caution others not to follow in the same direction.

What is more, Noah himself would appreciate this interpretation so that his behavior (which may have been right during his time, under those unique circumstances) should not serve as a paradigm for others at other times. [7] Genesis 9:20 [8] Rashi to Genesis 7:7, quoting Midrash Rabah Bereishis 32:6 [9] My thanks to Rabbi Moshe Kahn (Melbourne) for his assistance in developing this insight.

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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Taamei Hamitzvos - Procreation

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

(Mitzvah 1 in Sefer HaChinuch)

Hashem's first words to mankind were "P'ru u'rvu u'milu es ha'aretz — Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth" (Bereishis 1:28). These were also the first words that Hashem said to Noah and his sons when they emerged from the Ark (*ibid.* 9:1). As the first Mitzvah in the Torah, it is of primary importance. Therefore, when a person dies and ascends to Heaven, he is asked whether he was "involved" in this Mitzvah, either by bearing children or by helping others get married so that they may bear children (Shabbos 31a and Maharsha).

The basic Mitzvah entails bearing one son and one daughter, but it is also a Mitzvah to multiply as much as possible (see Even HaEzer §1). Noting that the word u'rvu (multiply) can also mean to raise children, Rav Hirsch suggests that this Mitzvah includes raising children and teaching them proper conduct.

The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of being fruitful and multiplying; so, too, the Final Redemption will come about only when the Jewish people are fruitful, multiply and fill the world (Tanna Dvei Eliyahu Zuta ch. 14).

The commentaries offer several reasons for this Mitzvah:

Since man does not live forever, his service of Hashem includes leaving behind another generation that will continue that service (Rav Menachem HaBavli). This is why the Mitzvah requires a husband and wife to bear a son and a daughter, who can replace them.

The requirement to provide a "replacement" for when we leave the world reminds us of our mortality and humbles us before our eternal Creator (see Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer ch. 12).

Hashem commanded mankind to multiply so that the world would be settled, populated, and could thereby fulfill its purpose (Sefer HaChinuch).

"A king's glory is apparent through multitudes of subjects" (Mishlei 14:28). The more children a person bears, the more he increases Hashem's glory, which is the purpose of Creation (Yalkut HaMachiri, *ibid.*). Furthermore, since man was created in Hashem's image, procreation increases Hashem's image (Yevamos 63b).

Mashiach will not arrive until all the souls come down from Heaven (Yevamos 62a). This is because each soul accomplishes another part of mankind's mission.

We connect with Hashem by emulating His ways, such as by performing acts of kindness and compassion (Rashi to Devarim 13:5). Since He creates and nurtures countless living beings, He commanded us to emulate Him by bearing and raising children.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

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subject: Tidbits • Parshas Noach 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

Summary: NOACH: Noah is righteous • Building the Teivah and gathering animals • Noah is six hundred years old when the great flood begins • Noah and family enter the Teivah • Rains fall and waters rise from the depths for forty days, covering the mountains • Everything on land is obliterated • The waters roil for 150 days, then begin to recede • The Teivah comes to rest on the Ararat mountains • The raven is sent from the Teivah • The dove is sent out twice, bringing back an olive leaf the second time • The dove is sent out a third time, and it does not return • Noah and

family leave the Teivah • Noach offers sacrifices • Hashem promises to never again bring a flood • Noach and his children are now permitted to eat meat • The sign of the rainbow • Noach's planting of a vineyard and subsequent denigration • Canaan is cursed • The descendants of Noach's 3 children; 70 nations fill the earth • The tower of Bavel • Ten generations from Noach to Avram

Haftarah: The haftarah (Yeshaya 54:1-55:5) cites Hashem's promise to never again punish the world's sins by a complete Mabul-like devastation.

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

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

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Noach

Don't be like Noah

We should always try our best not to be like Noah. That is one of the key lessons of Parshat Noah.

At the beginning of the parsha, the Torah tells us "va'tishachet ha'eretz lifnei ha'Elokim" - "and the earth was corrupted before God."

The Kotzker Rebbe brilliantly gives different punctuation to the sentence, and this is how he reads it: "Va'tishachet" - "there was corruption". And why was there corruption? It was because "ha'eretz lifnei ha'Elokim" - "people placed the earth before God". People's materialistic values were, in their eyes, far more important than Hashem and any spirituality that a person can experience.

Some of our commentators point out that Noah was the very antithesis of Moses. Why is that? Because, at the beginning of the parsha, Noah is described as "ish Tzadik, et ha'Elokim mithalech", "he was a righteous person who walked with God" and at the end of the parsha, after the flood, he's described as being "ish ha'adamah", "a man of the earth". However, with regard to Moses, the first time he is described by anybody, it is by the daughters of Jethro in Midian and they say that he is an "ish mitzri", "an Egyptian man".

And right at the end of the Torah, on the last day of his life, he is described as being "ish Ha'Elokim", "a man of God". Every single one of us throughout our lives, is on a journey. With regard to Noah's journey, he started way up there as a righteous man of God and he went all the way down to become a man of the earth.

Whereas, Moses was just the opposite, coming from being just an ordinary Egyptian, he went all the way up to becoming a man of God. So therefore, unlike Noah, on our personal journey here on earth, we should always strive to raise our maderigah, to raise the steps of our endeavor to reach greater and greater heights of spirituality and to come closer to Hashem.

One of the direct consequences of the 7th of October and the past two bitter years of conflict has been a strengthening of Jewish identity. I have seen it, I have heard it and I have come across so many people who feel more Jewish on their journey in life. They are now focusing far more on their spiritual identity. In his recent historic address to the Knesset, President Donald Trump, in his words, ushered in, "a new age of faith, of hope and of God".

This indeed is the opportunity of this moment. Let us not squander the chances we have, and let us focus always on being far more like Moses

than on being like Noah. Shabbat Shalom.

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Parshas Noach

Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Nina Schechter, Chaya bas Eliyahu.

Clothes Call

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

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

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

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

Rashi explains that this disparity is because Shem's merit was greater since he acted with greater alacrity than Yefes in the performance of this mitzvah. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that a modicum of extra effort - a mere technical difference between the actions of the two - led to such a colossal difference between the two brothers' rewards.

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

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

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

Peace or Piece?

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

Rashi (ad loc) contrasts the sins of the generation of the flood with that of the generation of the dispersion: The generation of the flood deserved

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

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

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

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

This is precisely what Hashem did for the generation of the dispersion. Originally, their unity in purpose was a unifying factor, but ultimately it would have likely dissolved into interpersonal conflict once the original purpose was either achieved or otherwise became irrelevant. Hashem actually gave them a lasting chance at shalom by giving each component of the generation their own space and language.

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

from: Rabbi Efrem Goldberg <reg@brsonline.org>

One More Conversation with Rabbi Hauer z"l

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Coming off a joyous Simchas Torah, the excitement of the Yom Tov heightened with gratitude for the return of the twenty living hostages, I turned on my phone after Havdalah, eager to see more pictures of reunions and read stories of courage and resilience. And then, like so many others, I was stunned: my dear friend and mentor, Rabbi Moshe Hauer z"l, had suddenly passed away. It didn't make sense. I couldn't process it.

In the days since he was so abruptly taken from us, one thought has played over and over in my mind. If I had known that he would no longer be here on Motzei Yom Tov, I would have called him on Erev Yom Tov. I would have finished our conversations, told him what he meant to me, thanked him for all I had learned from him, and sought his guidance on how to continue the work he began.

I first met Rabbi Hauer many years ago, at a gathering organized by a mutual friend who brought together people he felt should know one another. There was no particular agenda, it wasn't hosted by any organization, and it was such a success that for years, our group met annually to share, be vulnerable, brainstorm, collaborate, and inspire one

another.

At the first gathering, we were strangers: guarded, cautious, and formal with one another. Rabbi Hauer sensed a need to break the ice and I vividly remember when he said, "Let's get comfortable, let's be real. Enough with formalities. I am Moshe, not Rabbi Hauer," and he proceeded to take his tie off, something I wasn't under the impression he did often. At each gathering, his presence and participation contributed enormously. With great humility and impeccable middos, he didn't speak the most, and certainly not the loudest, but when he spoke he was a fountain of wisdom, thoughtfulness, insight. He was sensitive, complimentary, authentic, genuine, and driven.

What impressed me most over the years was that Rabbi Hauer was a true Ben Torah in every sense. As he built his shul and guided his community, he never left the Beis Midrash, never closed the Gemara. He remained growth-oriented, always striving, always climbing higher, and always inviting us to climb alongside him. Every conversation he had, every initiative he supported, was framed by a deep care for Klal Yisrael, for the community at large, and for each individual within it.

He was rare: proud and unapologetic about his hashkafa, his rebbeim, his principles, and his values, yet effortlessly and seamlessly connected with people of all backgrounds. He found common ground and common cause with everyone, and saw the Godliness in each person, developing genuine bonds while always remaining true to himself.

It is telling that in the days since his passing, tributes have come from a staggering variety of sources, including politicians and "plain" people, organizations like the OU and Agudah, the ADL, yeshivas and rabbis across denominations, and even the Catholic Bishops of New York. Rabbi Hauer's reach was profound because his relationships were real, never performative, transactional, or forced.

Professionally, he shaped my rabbinate in countless ways, in ideas and practices I emulate, in how I see myself and my responsibility, in how I dream for Klal Yisrael. He stood with me when I needed support, spoke honestly when I needed feedback, and always did so with love. Personally, his loss is devastating. I find myself replaying voice notes he sent, each beginning with the affectionate, "Yedidi Rav Efrem." In one, he said, "This message will have four points: Firstly, I haven't spoken to you in ages, which I don't like. Secondly, thank you for all you do," before moving on to practical matters.

Here is the thing. I know I am far from the only one. Rabbi Hauer had this warm, affectionate, complimentary, close connection with countless shul members, talmidim, colleagues, friends, and community leaders. His love for us was real, it was genuine, and it nourished our souls and warmed our hearts.

When he became the Executive Vice President of the OU, a leader and spokesperson for Klal Yisrael, his title and sense of mission changed but his character and personal conduct remained the same.

When the Torah describes how Moshe and Aharon went to confront Pharaoh it says (Shemos 6:27):

הֵם הַמְדַבְּרִים אֶל־פַּרְעֹה מִלִּדְמוּצֵי־הַיָּם לְהוֹצִיא.....רָאָה מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moshe and Aaron.

What does it mean these are the same Moshe and Aharon, as opposed to different ones? Rashi explains, it means despite their rise to greatness, their high profile, prominence, even power as spokespeople of Klal Yisrael, they were unchanged as people, they remained humble and mission driven.

The same can be said about Rabbi Hauer. הוּא מֹשֶׁה, he was the same person, as Rashi says,

בְּשִׁלְחוֹתָם וּבְצִדְקָתָם מִתְחִלָּה וְעַד סוּף, with a sense of mission from beginning to end and with righteousness.

Rabbi Hauer set the bar for his colleagues and friends. We strived to be like him and now he is gone. Reflecting on our unfinished conversations, I am reminded of the Gemara (Shabbos 153a) which advises we should do teshuva one day before we die. How can anyone know that day? The answer is profound: live each day as if it could be your last, and strive to be your best. We can't speak to everyone as if it's our last chance, but we can ensure that the people who matter most know how much they mean to us.

One of Rabbi Hauer's favorite insights, which he shared with me several times, is from the moment when Hashem visits Avraham after his bris, and three travelers appear at his doorstep. Avraham interrupts his conversation with Hashem to greet and host them. Rabbi Hauer would ask: how could he do such a thing? Wasn't it disrespectful to Hashem? He explained that in that moment, Avraham had a choice: to continue speaking with Hashem or to act like Hashem by showing kindness. The greater tribute, Rabbi Hauer suggested, was the latter.

Rabbi Hauer has been taken from us. We can no longer speak to him directly, but we can strive to be more like him: genuine, compassionate, thoughtful, and concerned about Klal Yisrael. In doing so, we offer a tribute he would have considered even higher than words.

Fw

From Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

AVRAHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

The study of Midrash Aggadah has always been challenging - to identify which interpretations are interpretive and an attempt to discern the straightforward meaning of the text, which are polemic (typically against the early Christians), which are veiled attacks (e.g. on the Roman Empire), which are traditional lore that the homileticist is "hanging" on a particular text etc. Much of the derision shown by many towards statements in the Midrash Aggadah (indicated by phrases such as "it's only a Midrash") is rooted in an inability (or unwillingness) to rigorously address the text and analyze its various components; understanding that some are intended as literal interpretations and an actual retelling of history while others are poetic and artistic devices intended to drive home a critical point. R. Avraham ben haRambam neatly divided the students of Aggadah into three groups - those who take everything

literally, who are fools, those who take nothing literally, who are heretics - and those who wisely analyze each passage and discern how each passage ought to be studied. A proper and incisive approach to the study of Midrash Aggadah - knowing which passage to approach with which perspective - consistently rewards the student with a discovery of depths of wisdom and profound sensitivity

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

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

II THE MIDRASH

A: PREFACE

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

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

And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered

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

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

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

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

And Haran died in front of Terach his father.

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

Terach was an idolater.

One day he went out somewhere, and put Avraham in charge of selling [the idols].

When a man would come who wanted to purchase, he would say to him: "How old are you?"

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

[Avraham] would say: "Woe to the man who is sixty years old And desires to worship something one day old." [The customer] would be ashamed and leave.

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

She said: "Here, offer it before them." Abraham siezed a stick,

And smashed all the idols,

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

When his father came, he said to him:

"Who did this to them?"

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

She said: “Here, offer it before them.”

When I offered it, one god said: “I will eat first,” And another said, “No, I will eat first.”

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

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

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

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

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

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the water which extinguishes the fire.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the water”.

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

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

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the wind which scatters the clouds.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the wind”.

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

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

“I will throw you into it.

“Let the G-d to Whom you bow come and save you from it.” Haran was there.

He said [to himself] Either way;

If Avraham is successful, I will say that I am with Avraham; If Nimrod is successful, I will say that I am with Nimrod. Once Avraham went into the furnace and was saved, They asked [Haran]: “With which one are you [allied]”? He said to them: “I am with Avraham.”

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

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

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

C: THE OVERALL QUESTION

Reading this Aggadah, one is immediately struck by the non-Midrashic style. There is absolutely no association with text here.

Instead, there is a detailed story, down to the specifics of the debate between Avraham and Nimrod, the manner in which Avraham would shame his customers and the story he concocted to explain the decimation of the “inventory” to his father. The question one must pose here is one of source - from where did the rabbis derive this information? How do they know that Terach was an idol salesman; that Avraham spoke this way to his customers, the other way to his father, in such a manner to Nimrod - and why would we even think that Avraham and Nimrod ever met?

The one answer which is always available and seems an “easy way out” is “Mesorah”. To with, the rabbis had a reliable tradition going back to Avraham himself that this is how this particular series of events played out. That is appealing - although anyone embracing this approach would have to contend with variations in alternate versions - yet there are two serious problems with this *res p o n s e* . First of all, if this was a reliable tradition dating back to Avraham, why isn’t that mentioned in the text of the Aggadah? After all, when the Rabbis have reliable traditions dating back to a much more recent time, they indicate this (see, *inter alia*, M. Peah 2:6) or, at the very least, refer to the statement as “Gemara” or *hbhvk vank vfkv* or , in Aggadic contexts - *ubhshc ,ruxn vz rcs* (BT Yoma 21a). Second of all, why is the entire Aggadah credited to one authority (R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafo)? Shouldn’t it be presented as an anonymous text?

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

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

D: THE THESIS

Although direct derivations are not found in this Aggadah (albeit the opening and closing lines anchor the Aggadah in a Midrashic attempt to identify the reason for Haran’s early demise), I’d like to suggest that the entire

reconstruction of Avraham’s life here is the result of Parshanut - textual interpretation. In other words, every one of the major components of this selection is the result of a reasonable read of T’nakh.

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

III RECONSTRUCTING THE MIDRASH

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

A: Terach the idolater

B: Terach the salesman

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation

D: Avraham’s meeting with Nimrod E: Avraham in the fire

F: Haran and “Pascal’s Wager”

A: Terach the Idolater

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

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

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

When the Aggadah begins by stating “Terach was an idolater”, it isn’t innovating a new idea or revising history - this is the information found in Yehoshua’s farewell address.

B: Terach the Salesman

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

First of all, society in the ancient world was not transient. People stayed in one area for generations except for cases of war or famine (which is why the call to Avraham of “Lekh L’kha” is so extravagant and reckoned as the first of his tests.) Only people whose livelihood allowed them to move easily did so - and, as the text tells us, Terach took his family from Ur towards K’na’an, getting only as far as Charan. Terach was the first person to uproot from one location to another without direct Divine intervention (such as Adam, Kayyin and the people in Shin’ar who were exiled). Hence, he must have had a profession which allowed him to easily move

- which leaves him either as a shepherd, an artisan or a salesman. As we demonstrated in an earlier shiur (V’shinantam 3/6), Avraham and Ya’akov were traders whose chief livelihood and fortune were made in that fashion.

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

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation

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

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

shame, the customer slinks out of the shop.

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

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

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

It seems that Avraham went there in order to engage in debate, a debate which could only begin once the people challenged him and were receptive (as a result of their great fear) to what he had to say. It seems to have succeeded, at least partially, because Avimelekh (or his son) recognized G-d's support for Yitzchak (26:28), implying that they had some understanding of - and respect for - the G-d of Avraham.

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

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

D: Avraham's meeting with Nimrod

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

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

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

Avraham is also considered royalty:

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

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

E: Avraham in the fire

When G-d addresses Avraham in anticipation of the first covenant (chapter 15), He states: I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim (15:7).

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

is a place name, it may have been named after a great furnace found there.

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

The only other place in the Torah where the phrase lh,tmuv rat appears is in the first statement of the Decalogue: I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt...(Sh'mot 20:2, D'varim 5:6)

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

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

While we have much information about the miracles leading up to the Exodus, there is little in T'nakh to describe the servitude from which we were redeemed.

There is, however, one description of the Egyptian sojourn which appears in three places in T'nakh. In D'varim 4:20, I Melakhim 8:51 and Yirmiyah 11:4, the Egypt from which we were redeemed is called an iron furnace (kzrc ruf). So...if G-d presents Himself, as it were, to Avraham, with the words "that took you out" and we have no information as to what it was from which Avraham was saved, we can look at the parallel passage and, using the description of Egypt found throughout T'nakh, conclude that Avraham was saved from - a furnace!

F: Haran and "Pascal's Wager"

The final point in the Midrash which we will address is the role of Haran here. He engages in what is commonly referred to as Pascal's

Wager. Blaise Pascal (1623 - 1662), a French mathematician and logician, suggested that it is a good idea to believe in G-d, based on "the odds". If one doesn't believe in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will be eternally damned. If, on the other hand, he is right, he will achieve salvation. If, on the other hand, he believes in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will have lost nothing...

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

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

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

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

When Avraham and Lot needed to separate, Avraham offered Lot his choice:

"If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will take the left" - meaning that they will divide up the mountain range between north (left) and south (right). Avraham abjured Lot to remain in the mountains, a place of greater faith and solitude (see, inter alia, D'varim 11:10-12). Instead,

Lot chose the "easy life" of S'dom, which, at the time, appeared as "the garden of Hashem, the land of Egypt" - lush and fertile. We have discussed the attitudinal implications of his choice elsewhere.

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

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

<https://www.alexisrael.org/noah-decreation-recreation/6/>

Parashat Noah:

Noah in the Garden of Eden

Rabbi Alex Israel

Chavruta: Chavruta learning should focus upon the episode of Noah's drunkenness 9:18-29.

The text and classical commentaries should provide more than enough food for study and discussion!

Shiur: The story of the Flood is, at first glance, a story of destruction. The

optimism, the positive mood, the excitement of the new world of Bereshit, is replaced by disappointment, as society descends into a chaotic violence that destroys society itself. God then decides to put an end to that world.

"The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every thought of his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. The Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth man whom I created - man together with beasts, insects and the birds of the sky ...'" (6:5-7) The good that embodied creation (יְרֵאָה אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב) has now become evil and wicked (רַע) and hence the world is "blotted out."

THE SYMMETRY OF THE FLOOD

On the one hand, we may then view the Flood as the conclusion, the sad epilogue to the Creation story. It closes the world created in seven days, and virtually obliterates it. It is the end of an era.

That is true. However the Flood has a different dynamic as well. From a literary vantage point, it exists as an independent literary structure, and this implies that the flood has its own story to tell. The flood is not simply the end of something. It is also the beginning of something. This may be seen illustrated by a simple number exercise - a study in symmetry of numbers.

A1 7:10. And it came to pass **after the seven days**, that the flood waters were upon the earth.

B1 7:12 And the rain was upon the earth for **forty days and forty nights**

C1 7:24 And the water swirled upon the earth **a hundred and fifty days**.

D 8:1 And God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a spirit to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.

C2 8:3 And the waters receded off the earth more and more, and the water diminished at the end of **a hundred and fifty days**

B2 8:6 And it came to pass **at the end of forty days**, that Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.

A2 8:10 And he waited again **another seven days**, and he again sent forth the dove from the ark. And the dove returned to him at eventide, and behold it had plucked an olive leaf in its mouth; so Noah knew that the water had abated from upon the earth. Here we see a structure of 7-40-150-150-40-7. What this tells me is that the Torah is deliberately seeing the Flood in a chiasmic manner; the advance of the waters and their retreat, the destruction and the revival, the punishment and the recovery. Far from the Flood being seen simply as the final note to the Creation of the world, we must also view it as the prologue, the foundation work of a new world.

CHAPTER 8 AS CREATION

Some years ago, Rabbi Joshua Berman wrote an article[1] in Herzog College's Tanach journal, Megadim. There he argued that Chapter 8 - the recovery of the flood and the subsiding of the waters - is more than a rebuilding. He argued that chapter 8 was a veritable re-creation.

Day	Bereshit Chapter 8	Bereshit Chapter 1
1	8:1 and God caused a spirit to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.	and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water.
2	8:2 And the springs of the deep were closed, and the windows of the heavens, and the rain from the heavens was withheld.	God made the expanse and it separated between the water that was below the expanse and the water that was above the expanse.
3	8:5, 11 the mountain peaks appeared... the dove returned... an olive leaf in its mouth	God said, "Let the water... gather into one place, and let the dry land appear..." Let the earth sprout vegetation... and fruit trees"
4	8:11 seven days... evening	And God made the two great luminaries: the great luminary to rule the day and the lesser luminary to rule the night, and the stars.
5	8:7 he sent forth the raven, and it went out, back and forth	let birds fly over the earth
6	8:17 Every living thing that is with you of all flesh, of fowl, and of animals and of all the creeping things that creep on the earth, bring out with you, and they shall swarm upon the earth, and they shall be fruitful and multiply upon the earth	"Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind, cattle and creeping things and the beasts of the earth according to their kind
	Ch.9 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and He said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2. And your fear and your dread shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the fowl of the heaven; upon everything that creeps upon the ground and upon all the fish of the sea. [for] they have been given into your hand[s]. 3. Every moving thing that lives shall be yours to eat; like the green vegetation, I have given you everything. 6. ...for He made Man in His image....	And God created man in His image, in the image of God... God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the sky and over all the beasts that tread upon the earth." 29. And God said, "Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing herb, which is upon the surface of the entire earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit; it will be yours for food.

As the Flood waters subside it is not simply that the old world is revealed. No! A new world is created! The text of ch.8 follows almost precisely the order of the creation in Bereshit ch.1!

First we have the SPIRIT OF GOD HOVERING upon the water - just like on Day 1 of Creation. Next, the floodwaters ABOVE and BELOW are stopped, a clear parallel to the division of waters on Day 2 creating a non-water space in between. DAY 3 is the exposure of dry land and the creation of plants, represented here by the finding of dry land and the olive branch. Day 4 is more complicated. Day 4 is the creation of luminaries - sun and moon - to regulate time, as it says in Bereshit:

And God said, "Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens, to separate between the day and between the night, and they shall be for signs and for appointed seasons and for days and years.

Here too, God pronounces after the Mabul:

"So long as the earth endures, Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease." (8:22)

Clearly, this pronouncement informs us that time stopped in some way during the flood. No seasons existed, and it would appear that even night and day were suspended in some manner during the flood period. And hence, Noah's understanding that the dove has to be sent after 7 days clearly indicates that the days and nights, the regulation of time via the luminaries of Day 4, have been resumed. Day 5 is reflected in the birds - the raven and dove - creations of day 5 now released to their habitat. And day 6 is the releasing of the animals - all defined using their chapter 1 language - to the wild from the restriction of the Teivah, the Ark.

The pinnacle of this entire structure however, comes when Noah is addressed by God who instructs him in a manner that is parallel, if not identical, to the original commands[2] to Adam as seen in ch.1. Here we have "be fruitful and multiply"; we have the information as to the food that is at Noah's disposal etc.

It is clear from all of this that this is not simply the end of the flood, but very deliberately, very clearly stated, this is a NEW CREATION! This is the Bereshit of a new world. In this world, God accepts that "the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth," and he seeks despite that reality to establish a covenant with Man, with Noah, promising to continue the world indefinitely. As Noah emerges from the Teiva, God expresses his confidence and faith in Mankind!

NOACH GETS DRUNK

And now, I would like to turn our attention to a significant parallel which I have certain questions about and which needs further thought and attention. We should look at the Parsha which comes AFTER the flood.

And Noah, the Man of the Earth, planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took the garment, and they placed [it] on both of their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and they covered their father's nakedness... Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his small son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren..." And Noah lived after the Flood, three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. (9:22-29)

This story has always puzzled me. What exactly does it contribute to the story?

What does it say about Noah as a person? Did Noah intend to get drunk or was it an accident? Why is Cham's sin so severe[3] as to warrant an eternal curse? Why is this story the final story that we are to witness regarding Noah?

But suddenly after understanding that we have a process of Destruction and ReCreation, I had a new thought in reading this chapter. Let me explain:

NOACH IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Here we might suggest a fascinating parallel. In the "first" story of creation: Ch.1 was the story of the Creation. Chapter 2 described Gan Eden, Chapter 3 the sin of Gan Eden and the punishment.

Now, here: Chapter 8-9 is the NEW creation. So our story is a parallel to Gan Eden.

Note the following parallels between the Gan Eden story and Noah's vineyard:

The text states that Noah plants a vineyard. This deliberate emphasis upon planting, and the formation of a garden of sorts finds its parallel in the Garden of Eden whose planting is similarly expressed and emphasized: "And God planted a Garden in Eden." (2:8) Noah eats from the fruit of his garden. By eating from the fruit, his consciousness is altered. Noah is referred to as Ish Adama. Adama reflecting Adam. He rolls naked in his tent, reflecting the nakedness of Adam prior to the Sin. Moreover, his drunken state allows him not to be ashamed (at the time at least!) The result of the parsha is that a Curse is issued.

I believe that this connection is reinforced by the fact that Chazal go so far as to suggest that Noah actually ate from the self-same vine as Adam![4]

So we have a parallel. But what could it mean?

TEMPTATION

The Ramban writes:

"The episode with Noah and the wine is written as a warning more severe than the parsha of the Nazir. We see here that even the "perfect Tzaddik (6:9) whose righteousness saved all humanity, even he, was induced to sin by wine, leading him to a point of absolute humiliation and the curse of his offspring."

The Talmud repeatedly recalls this episode as a warning to the curses of wine drinking and drunkenness. "There is nothing that brings woe to Man more than wine" (Brachot 40a)[5] If there is a parallel with Gan Eden, then our starting point is that of the seductive tempting quality of wine. The mind-altering qualities of wine are reminiscent of the desire of Adam and Eve for a different state of mind. Interestingly in Gan Eden the snake seduces man to eat from the fruit. Here, the seduction of the snake is supplanted here by the seduction of the fruit itself! Maybe

we are being told here that even in the New World, there are temptations. Man should beware.

But there is something here, in addition, about the effects of succumbing to temptation. Maybe the story adds that in this post-Flood world, God will not eject us from the garden. God will not strike us with lightning nor bring another Flood to punish us. However, there are substances and actions which if abused may bring our own debasement. God has promised not to "curse the ground because of man" but we can generate our own curse if we succumb to physical temptations.[6]

ESCAPISM

Here is one possible approach. The Abarbanel says the following:

"Before the Flood there were vines for eating, but not vineyards with rows upon rows of vines for wine production. Noah took saplings that he had kept on the Ark, planting them in rows to make wine. Maybe this is due to the fact that he gave up on life after the Flood, desiring to drink wine rather than water (reminiscent of the flood waters) so that he would never see water again!"

The wine then is then a reaction to the Flood. It is an act of escapism Rav Yitzchak Blau writes:

"According to one midrash (Bereishit Rabba 34:6), Noah incredulously asks "Should I go out and propagate the world only to see it destroyed?" Hashem needs to reassure Noah and convince Noah to emerge and once again begin the building of a world. ... Noah's descent to the bottle reflects the response of escapism. When a person can not face the overwhelming ugliness about, he can always take refuge in a variety of mind numbing sedatives."

The deafening silence of a world uninhabited haunts Noah. He cannot come to terms with the fact that other than his family, everyone is dead, and he is the lone survivor. And in this parsha then, Noah becomes the anti-hero of the story. Rather than being the Tzaddik who can save the world[7], he turns face against the world, refusing to further its progress, abandoning the world-building that awaits.[8]

But how might this relate to Gan Eden? On the one hand, we could propose that Noah's escapism is the cardinal sin of that generation. However, a learned friend once suggested to me a more radical thought that follows this line of thinking.

Noah rolls about naked – just like Adam and Eve - in the garden because he wants to return to Gan Eden. He desires to recreate the old world where there was no sin, to return to a pre-sin state. He tries to replant Gan Eden, and he thrusts himself into a state of mind where he is drunk; where rather than eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he has an absence of knowledge! Of course, it didn't work! The text states that, "he knew what his younger son had done to him." He does have knowledge. He cannot return. Indeed it is his son, Cham, who mocks his father's nakedness, as if to say: "Dad, you cannot live in a virtual reality. You are trying to rebuild the past. Face the future!" But of course, in this sad image, Noah is incapable of facing the future.

THE EXILE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

This Noah-Gan Eden parallel is interesting. I am certain that this shiur has not exhausted the possible angles here. Maybe you will come up with a new avenue of understanding here.

Interestingly, the Midrash Rabba sees this entire story on a far broader canvas[9]. The Midrash sees the word "Vayitgal" and hears intonations of the word "Galut," Exile. The Midrash makes a fascinating statement referring to the Jewish Exile of the First Temple period. Using parallel verses from Amos and Yishayahu, the Midrash connects the Noah story to the story of Am Yisrael:

"Noah caused exile for himself and for future generations! The ten tribes were exiled due to wine... Yehudah and Binyamin were exiled because of wine." (BR 36:4)

This Midrash again reinforces our parallel here. Noah's story is framed as a narrative of Exile, much like Gan Eden. The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) takes this Midrash and says that just like wine dulls the senses, Am Yisrael in their indulgent lifestyle eclipsed God. We were drunk, and lost sense of the life's genuine priorities. We were given a chance of Gan Eden. We sinned and were ejected. Yes! Like Noah, the Jewish nation experienced destruction and Exile. But did the Jewish nation abandon life after exile? No! In contrast to Noah, we witnessed destruction and tragedy and yet as a nation we faced up to life, always building and planting. Rather than trying to create illusory realities, the Jewish people built shuls, wrote the Talmud, practiced Chessed and always hoped and dreamed to return from Exile back to the Eden of the Promised Land. Shabbat Shalom!

NOTES

1. <http://www.herzog.ac.il/main/megadim/9br.html>

2. See the VBM shiurim which discuss the parallel in detail. Rav Yoni Grossman <http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.58/02noach.htm> and Rav Tamir Granot: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha66/02-66noach.htm>

3. Chazal describe Cham as sexually assaulting Noah in some manner – see Rashi. The Ramban, Abarbanel and others take the approach that he simply saw his father naked and mocked him for it. This is worthy of thorough analysis and we shall leave it for a different time.

מצאה נח גבן שגרשה ויצאה מגן עדן ואשכולותיה עמה נטל מפירותיה ואכל וחמד ג' " אליעזר פרק כ' פרקי דר[4] " ... שתה ממנו יין ונתגל בתוך האהלה... בו ביום נשתגשו פירותיה. אותה בלבו ונטע ממנו כרם בארץ ואמרי לה, תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ע' עמוד א' ויהל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם אמר רב הסדא אמר רב עוקבא

. שלא גרם לו אלא יין, לא היה לך ללמוד מאדם הראשון, נח: אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לנח:מר עוקבא אמר רבי זכאי כמאן דאמר אותו אילן שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון גפן היה

ושת מן היין וישכר+בראשית ט+ : שנאמר, דבר שמביא יללה על האדם אלא יין

5. See the other sources in the above note 4, and also this interesting Midrash: חסדדרין דף ע' עמוד א' ויהל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם וישת מן היין וישכר '+בראשית ט+ נאמר ביון " שלש עשרה ווי:דריש עובר גלילאה ויתגל בתוך אהלו וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחזק ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה וישמו על שכם וייקץ נח מיינו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם וגו'

Here the Midrash sees 13 verbs each starting with the letter "Vav" or the phonetic sound "Va" and expressing the sound "Vay" or "Woe!" – a sound of lament and mourning. This Midrash exemplifies Chazal's sensitivity to the resonance of sound in Torah reading as the Midrash sees the repeated "Va" sound as forming a poetic refrain warning the reader of the devastating effects of wine. The Ktav VeHakabbala has a different reading of these multiple verbs. He states that any place in which there is verb after verb indicates speed, a quick succession. Likewise, the list of verbs here indicates the speed at which wine intoxicates.

6. An approach somewhat in this direction maybe found in Devora Steinmetz: "Vineyard, Farm and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History." Journal of Biblical Literature 113/2 (1194) pgs.193-207.

7. See the powerful comments of the Meshekh Chochma on these verses.

8. Chazal suggest that Cham castrated Noah! Part of this explanation is due to the fact that apparently, Noah had no further children (and compare 9:29 to 10:1 and also to all the similar lines in ch.5 where the death of a person is always associated with the phrase 'And he fathered sons and daughters.') This despite Gods clear instruction of "be fruitful and multiply." But the inner meaning of castration is the refusal to even consider further procreation. With this imagery Chazal are expressing Noah's post-flood persona as unable to contribute to the New World, as a paradigm of deliberate impotence.

9. The sons of Noah are seen in this broader meta-Historic reading as references to Cyrus and Persia.

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

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. TWO STORIES - AGAIN???

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

A: THE NATURE OF EVIL

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

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

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

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

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

B: THE MERIT OF NOAH

Q2: What was Noah's merit?

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

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

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

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

C: HOW MANY ANIMALS?

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

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

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

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

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

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

D: COVENANT - OR COMMITMENT?

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

II. SCIENCE VS. TORAH

CONFLICT OR ILLUSION?

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

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

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

Responses to this apparent problem have fallen into three groups:

GROUP A: THE REJECTIONISTS

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

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

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

GROUP B: THE INTEGRATIONISTS

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

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

the earth "developing" the body is curiously close to the process outlined by Darwin - in the widest of strokes.)

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

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

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

GROUP C: THE TELEOLOGISTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. THE "TWO ADAMS"

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

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

being, bearing the Image of God and acting as His agent in the world (Adam I).

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

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

We can now return to our questions.

IV. BACK TO NOAH

Why did God decide to destroy the earth?

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

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

This easily explains why Noah was chosen:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parshat No'ah: Creation Unzipped

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

QUICK REVIEW:

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

A DOSE OF REALITY:

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

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT:

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

BERESHIT 6:5-7 --

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

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

THE FLOOD: MANIFESTATION OF A DEEPER DESTRUCTION:

BERESHIT 6:11 --

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

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

PLANNING AHEAD:

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

BERESHIT 7:1-6 --

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

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

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

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

THE "UNZIPPING" OF THE WORLD:

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

BERESHIT 7:6 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

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

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

THE NEXT STEP:

BERESHIT 7:10-11 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

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

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

Let us continue in Parashat No'ah:

BERESHIT 7:13-14 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:25 --

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

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

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

BERESHIT 7:19-20 --

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

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

CREATION, TAKE II:

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

BERESHIT 8:1 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:2 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:2 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:6-8 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:5-14 --

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

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

BERESHIT 1:9-10 --

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

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

BERESHIT 8:21-22 --

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

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

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

Not necessarily. Note that our parasha is the turning point between two phases of Hashem's relationship with humanity: in phase one, he creates humanity and assigns it a mission: to reflect the divine. Kayyin (Cain) is the first to fail this mission: he murders his brother, but seems to learn little from Hashem's reaction, as he neglects to impress upon his children the value of human life; his grandchildren continue his murderous pattern. Adam and Hava react by attempting to replace their first two children with a third child: Shet, who is described by the Torah as "created in the image" of Adam, who himself had been created in the image of God. Shet is Adam's hope; success in the tzelem Elokim mission rides upon his shoulders. But after several generations, humanity degenerates into violence and corruption, convincing Hashem that He had made a mistake by creating humanity. Hashem appears to preserve some hope for humanity, as he saves the life of Noah and his family. But Noah, too, disappoints Hashem, founding the new world only to plant a vineyard and stupefy himself with the wine it produces. Hashem now waits, as the generations pass -- He waits for someone like Avraham, whose appearance

marks phase two of Hashem's relationship with humanity. At some point between Noah and Avraham, Hashem gives up the notion that ALL of humanity can achieve the ideal, that ALL of humanity can maintain a relationship with Him as reflections of His divinity. Hashem decides that the great experiment of humanity can continue only with a small, select group of subjects. Hashem now looks for an individual or group of individuals to set an example for the rest of the world. Avraham is that individual; he and the nation he will found are selected for intimate relationship with Hashem. The rest of the world has shown that it is unable to maintain such a relationship, so Hashem now turns his attention to a select group. The aftermath of the Flood is the turning point at which the idea of an "Am Segula," a most-favored, most-treasured nation, takes shape. The damp soil of the Flood is the fertile ground from which sprouts the seed of Kelal Yisrael.

Shabbat shalom

AVRAHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

by Yitzchak Etshalom

I

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

Hence, the term "Halakhah" when standing alone (and describing a type of Rabbinic statement) would most properly be associated with a normative statement independent of the text. The word

“Aggadah” refers to a statement which is non-normative and, again, is not derived from or associated with a given text.

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

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

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

II THE MIDRASH

A: PREFACE

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

There are several well-known Aggadot which partially fill in the “missing years” of Avraham’s youth. Perhaps the most well-known

Aggadah appears in several versions and has, as its point of departure, a minor difficulty in the Torah’s retelling of Avraham’s family life:

And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. And Haran died before his father Terach in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Avram and Nachor took wives; the name

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

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

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

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

And Haran died in front of Terach his father.

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

Terach was an idolater.

One day he went out
somewhere, and put
Avraham in charge of
selling [the idols].

When a man would come who wanted to purchase, he
would say to him: "How old are you"?

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

[Avraham] would say: "Woe to the
man who is sixty years old And desires
to worship something one day old."

[The customer] would be ashamed and
leave.

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

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

siezed a stick,

And smashed all the idols,

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

When his father came, he said to him:

"Who did this to them"?

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

She said: “Here, offer it before them.”

When I offered it, one god said:

“I will eat first,” And another

said, “No, I will eat first.”

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

[His father] said:, “Are you making fun of me? Do they know anything?” [Avraham] answered: Shall your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?

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

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

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the water which extinguishes the fire.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the water”.

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the clouds which bear the water.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the clouds”.

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the wind which scatters the clouds.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the wind”.

[Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship man who withstands the wind.” [Nimrod] said to him: “You are speaking nonsense; I only bow to the fire.

“I will throw you into it.

“Let the G-d to Whom you bow come and save you from it.” Haran was there.

He said [to himself] Either way;

If Avraham is successful, I will say that I am with Avraham; If Nimrod is successful, I will say that I am with Nimrod. Once Avraham went into the furnace and was saved, They asked [Haran]: “With which one are you [allied]”?

He said to them: “I am with Avraham.”

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

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

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

C: THE OVERALL QUESTION

Reading this Aggadah, one is immediately struck by the non-Midrashic style. There is absolutely no association with text here.

Instead, there is a detailed story, down to the specifics of the debate between Avraham and Nimrod, the manner in which Avraham would shame his customers and the story he concocted to explain the decimation of the “inventory” to his father. The question one must pose here is one of source - from where did the rabbis derive this information? How do they know that Terach was an idolsalesman; that Avraham spoke this way to his customers, the other way to his father, in such a manner to Nimrod - and why would we even think that Avraham and Nimrod ever met?

The one answer which is always available and seems an “easy way out” is “Mesorah”. To wit, the rabbis had a reliable tradition going back to Avraham himself that this is how this particular series of events played out. That is appealing - although anyone embracing this approach would have to contend with variations in alternate versions - yet there are two serious problems with this response. First of all, if this was a reliable tradition dating back to Avraham, why isn't that mentioned in the text of the Aggadah? After all, when the Rabbis have reliable traditions dating back to a much more recent time, they indicate this (see, inter alia, M. Peah 2:6) or, at the very least, refer to the statement as “Gemara” or *hbhvk vank vfkv* or , in Aggadic contexts - *ubhshc ,ruxn vz rcs* (BT Yoma 21a). Second of all, why is the entire Aggadah credited to one authority (R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafo)? Shouldn't it be presented as an anonymous text?

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

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

D: THE THESIS

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

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

III RECONSTRUCTING THE MIDRASH

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

A: Terach the idolater

B: Terach the salesman

C: Avraham's style of argumentation

*D: Avraham's
meeting with*

Nimrod E:

*Avraham in the
fire*

F: Haran and "Pascal's Wager"

A: Terach the Idolater

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

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

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

When the Aggadah begins by stating "Terach was an idolater", it isn't innovating a new idea or revising history - this is the information found in Yehoshua's farewell address.

B: Terach the Salesman

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

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

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

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation

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

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

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

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

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

It seems that Avraham went there in order to engage in debate, a debate which could only begin once the people challenged him and were receptive (as a result of their great fear) to what he had to say. It seems to have succeeded, at least partially, because Avimelekh (or his son) recognized

G-d's support for Yitzchak (26:28), implying that they had some understanding of - and respect for - the G-d of Avraham.

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

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

D: Avraham's meeting with Nimrod

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

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

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

Avraham is also considered royalty:

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

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

E: Avraham in the fire

When G-d addresses Avraham in anticipation of the first covenant (chapter 15), He states: *I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim* (15:7).

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

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

The only other place in the Torah where the phrase *h,tmuv rat* appears is in the first statement of the Decalogue: *I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt...*(Sh’mot 20:2, D’varim 5:6)

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

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

While we have much information about the miracles leading up to the Exodus, there is little in T’nakh to describe the servitude from which we were redeemed. There is, however, one description of the Egyptian sojourn which appears in three places in T’nakh. In D’varim 4:20, I Melakhim 8:51 and Yirmiyah 11:4, the Egypt from which we were redeemed is called *an iron furnace*

(*kzrc ruf*). So...if G-d presents Himself, as it were, to Avraham, with the words “that took you out” and we have no information as to what it was from which Avraham was saved, we can look at the parallel passage and, using the description of Egypt found throughout T’nakh, conclude that Avraham was saved from - a furnace!

F: Haran and “Pascal’s Wager”

The final point in the Midrash which we will address is the role of Haran here. He engages in what is commonly referred to as Pascal’s

Wager. Blaise Pascal (1623 - 1662), a French mathematician and logician, suggested that it is a good idea to believe in G-d, based on “the odds”. If one doesn’t believe in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will be eternally damned. If, on the other hand, he is right, he will achieve salvation. If, on the other hand, he believes in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will have lost nothing...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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PARSHAT NOACH

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

FROM A LIST TO AN OUTLINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENTER - 'TOLADOT'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5	Toldot Adam to Noah
6->9	-> ha-mabul - The story of the Flood
10 11:1-9	Toldot Bnei Noah - Shem, Cham & Yefet -> Migdal Bavel - The Tower of Babel
11 12->25	Toldot Shem until Terach -> God's choice of Avraham Avinu
25 -35 36	Toldot Yitzchak - story of Yaakov & Esav 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 Noah' introduces the story of Noah'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 Noah). Other toldot are very detailed, e.g. those of Noah, 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 Noah (see chapter 5) lead immediately into the story of the Flood. Note how 9:28-29 - the psukim that conclude the Noah 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 Noah, it is **not** because he is designated to become a special nation - rather, it is because through Noah that mankind will be preserved. After the flood, the Torah tells us how Noah's offspring evolve into nations, and their dispersing (see chapter 10). Even though we find that Noah blesses Shem and Yefet (see 9:25-27), the concept of a **special** nation with a special covenant does not begin until the story of Avraham Avinu.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHEM & SHEM HASHEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM IS CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And when the prophet Tzefania describes ultimate redemption, we find once again an allusion to Migdal Bavel:

'ki az ehpoche el amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. (see 3:9)

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

(Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

for PARSHAT NOACH - 3 additional shiurim

SHIUR #1

TOLADOT BNEI NOACH

'Setting the stage' for Sefer Breishit

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

SPECIAL DETAILS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'SETTING THE STAGE'

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

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

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

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

SHIUR #2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEFORE THE FLOOD

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

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

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

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

AFTER THE FLOOD

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

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

BEFORE MIGDAL BAVEL

In the next chapter, when the Torah lists the genealogy of Noach's grandchildren, we find yet another use of the word "ha'chel" in the description of Nimrod:

"And Kush gave birth to Nimrod, HU HA'CHEL - he BEGAN - to be a GIBOR [strong/brave man] on earth... His kingdom began in Bavel..." (see 10:8-11!)

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

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

AT MIGDAL BAVEL

Finally, when God 'comes down' to punish the builders of MIGDAL BAVEL (see 11:1-9), we find yet another use of "hu'chal":

"And God came down to see the city and the tower... and He said, it is because they are united... v'zeh HA'CHILAM la'asot - and this caused them to START this undertaking, and now nothing will stop them..." (see 11:5-6)

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

BACK TO ENOSH

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

"LIKRO B'SHEM HASHEM"

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

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

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

As the prophet Tzania himself later explains, this concept becomes the ultimate goal of the Jewish nation: "For then I will unite all the nations together that they speak the same language so that they all CALL OUT IN GOD'S NAME - l'kro kulam b'shem Hashem - and to serve Him with one accord" (see Tzania 3:9/ see also I Kings 8:41-43).
[See also the "v'al kein nekaveh" prayer that we add after reciting "aleinu l'shabeach" - "v'chol bnei basar YIKRU B'SHMECHA" - .]

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

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

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

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SHIUR #3 - TOLADOT BNEI NOACH [Chapter Ten]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
Menachem