

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 14 #2, Oct. 16, 2026; 5 Chesvan 5787; Noach 5787

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 mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

One can build great arks, but unless the passion of his faith exudes from his soul, it may never touch others. He may save himself and his family, but no more. . . . to promote true faith one must be unwavering in his own commitment. Any lack thereof, albeit well intentioned, may get lost in a large, doubting crowd. For without one's own sense of absolute faith he will never lead others into his own ark d'triumph. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, "Parshas Noach: Ark D'triumph" (1987), <https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5758-noach/>.

Several scholars observe that the story of the flood and recreation of the world go through the same processes as the original creation. Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org go through the details and language in the Torah to demonstrate this process, which Rabbi Eitan Mayer summarizes as unzipping creation. Rabbi Fohrman observes that God decided to destroy version one of the world because the earth had become evil and needed to be destroyed. He concludes that the humans and animals who died in the flood were collateral damage rather than the targets of the destruction. However, I ask how the earth became evil. Would the earth have become evil without the influence of evil humans? If so, which way did cause and effect go? Did the earth make humans evil, or did evil humans create so much wrong that they made the earth itself evil? I lack the Judaic background to resolve my question – but I suspect that the cause goes in both directions. I suspect that wicked humans were largely responsible for the earth becoming evil, and any evil in the earth itself would have reinforced wickedness among humans.

When I search out and put together my weekly Devrei Torah, I put significant material in boldface. Going through the boldface material this evening, my impression is that putting these sentences together results in a much better introduction to the parsha than I could write on my own. Here is the message, in the words of several distinguished Torah scholars:

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz: What does believing a Torah narrative require of us? Historical truth asks whether an event occurred as described. Religious truth asks what the Torah reveals through its telling. The Torah is not a book of history. It is Torat Hashem: divine teaching that guides us in living as Jews and drawing close to God. Its stories serve that purpose. Their religious truth lies in what God teaches through them; the historical questions are beside the point. Torah brings us into a relationship with God. Learning becomes a way of hearing what He asks of us and deepening our service of Him. Understood this way, Torah brings us into a relationship with God. Learning becomes a way of hearing what He asks of us and deepening our service of Him.

Rabbi Hayyim Angel: The Torah employs biting irony. No matter how impressive human architecture may be, it cannot bring people closer to God or compel Him to appear. God remains utterly transcendent and free. What the Babylonians regarded as the center of cosmic order becomes, in the Torah's account, the place where human unity collapses. The builders [of

the Tower of Babel] sought to bridge the boundary between humanity and divinity through their own monumental achievements. Their error was not technological innovation itself, but the presumption that human beings could control access to God. This interpretation also clarifies why the Tower of Babel appears immediately before the emergence of Abraham. Humanity's attempt to establish a religious center through its own power ends in confusion and dispersion. God then chooses Abraham to begin a different religious journey, one founded upon obedience to God rather than the manipulation of divine power.

Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz: As we begin another year of reading the Torah, we are reminded that the story of Bereishit is not just about how the world began. It is also about the responsibility we have to make the world a better place.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l: The city. . . is not where we find God. . . .The first city was founded by the first murderer, the first fratricide. The city was born in blood. The most important fact about the first city, according to the Bible, is that it was built in defiance of God's will. People in a crowd can commit crimes they would not dream of doing on their own. The sheer population density of cities is a moral hazard in and of itself. . . .Names are something we are given. We do not make them for ourselves. . . . In large cities of Mesopotamia, people were actually worshipping a symbolic embodiment of themselves. The Babylonians are deemed guilty of mixing heaven and earth, [which] should always be kept separate. What the Torah is telling us, implicitly, is how and why Abrahamic monotheism was born. Polytheism is how rulers came to be seen as semi-divine – a blurring of boundaries. Human beings were considered in the mass rather than as individuals.

A close friend who has a high position in a Judaic organization wrote to me that her husband has a problem when the Torah relates stories that are difficult to accept literally. What the Rabbis I quote above tell us is the correct response to those who expect literal historical truth in the Torah. Our Torah is a means for humans to communicate with God. A day to humans does not necessarily mean the same thing to Hashem – because God is not of our world, existed before our world, and will exist long after we are gone. The Torah contains stories meant to teach humans how and why to live proper, moral lives. Subjects not directly relevant to these messages, such as the dinosaurs, belong in history and science books. The Torah is neither a history nor a science book. Just as we live in a different world than Hashem, the Torah exists in a different category than science and history books. When my sons were at the yeshiva, they had around ten different classes each day. While some of the subjects were in the same categories, others existed in different worlds. For example, a language class, math, and Navi all existed in different spheres. The fact that these subjects were in different spheres did not make any of them inconsistent with the others. We should view the Torah, history, and science the same way.

Many Nobel Prize winners (those worthy of the honor, not the political hacks in some categories) are religious people as well as scientists and outstanding people literature. These brilliant people understand the difference between religion and science. We should also understand this distinction.

My we keep learning and teach the best of our heritage and learning to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. 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. 2026 has been an especially difficult year for AlephBeta.org, so please consider donating now.

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 Zeezl Esther; 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; Rena Michal bat Sara, 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.

Haftarat Parshat Noach: Barren and Storm-Swept

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

The haftarah for Parshat Noach is, in fact, made up of verses from two other haftarot that are also read on other days in the Jewish calendar. The two distinct prophecies from Yeshayahu (Isaiah 54:1–55:5) are each read later in the year as part of the seven haftarot of consolation following Tisha B'Av: Roni Akara, *"Barren woman, rejoice"* (54:1–10), and Aniya So'ara, *"Oppressed and storm-swept"* (54:11–55:5). Because each is read separately later in the year, Sephardic communities read only the first prophecy on the Shabbat of Parshat Noach.

Yet it is precisely in the combination of the two prophecies that a deeper message emerges – a message geared toward any Jewish community seeking to rebuild after its own type of "flood." As the years after Noah and after Yeshayahu went on, the Jewish people would repeatedly have to confront the reality of destruction and exile. The questions Yeshayahu addresses are not merely ancient ones; they are questions that Jewish communities living outside the Land of Israel have had to confront throughout history.

Yeshayahu himself makes the connection to our parsha explicit. God declares: *"For these are the waters of Noach to Me, and I swore that the waters of Noach would never sweep again over the earth. And so did I swear no more to be furious with you, no more to rebuke you"* (v. 9). The covenant God made with humanity after the flood becomes the model for His promise to His people after their own catastrophe.

Then, the prophecy of *Roni Akara* portrays the people of Israel as a barren woman, emphasizing the marital relationship between God and Knesset Yisrael. This metaphor speaks to a fundamental anxiety of Jewish life in the diaspora: the fear that the Jewish people will have no future. Will our children retain their faithfulness to our tradition and national mission, or will our distinctive identity gradually dissolve? A barren woman may survive and even prosper, but without children, she fears that there is no tomorrow. So, too, a Jewish community may flourish in the present, while remaining uncertain about its continuity. To this anxiety, God responds as a husband reassuring his wife: *"Broaden the site of your tent; stretch out your canvas home; do not hold back; lengthen your tent cords, and strengthen its pegs... Do not fear – you will not be shamed"* (vv. 2–4). The promise is one of continuity and restoration. Israel will not be abandoned to the fear that its future has been cut off. *"For one small moment I left you; with infinite care shall I gather you back"* (v. 7).

The next prophecy, *Aniya So'ara*, addresses a different challenge of the diaspora. This is not a prophecy for times when life is going smoothly, nor does it focus on the quiet anxiety about the future that troubles the barren woman. Here, the woman is suffering in the present – *"oppressed and storm-swept, never comforted"* (v. 11). Her circumstances evoke the experience of Jewish communities in parts of the diaspora where persecution and antisemitism make daily life dangerous. The question is no longer whether there will be a Jewish future, but whether Jewish life can be sustained in the present.

Here, too, God answers with reassurance: *"I am fitting your windows with rubies, your gates with glowing granite, marking your borders with stones men covet"* (v. 12). Not only will you return to the Land, there will be restoration, security and abundance.

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein frames these two prophecies as distinct paradigms of diaspora life. Even when things are going well, Jewish communities must contend with the threat of barrenness – the challenge of sustaining the continuity of Knesset Yisrael in exile. And at other times, antisemitic violence threatens Jewish existence so strongly that the question is not only whether there will be a future, but whether there can be a viable present.

Each challenge demands its own kind of consolation: the barren woman needs to be assured of tomorrow; the storm-tossed woman needs to be assured that she will survive today.

Read together, then, the prophecies of this haftarah offer an extended reflection on the challenges that Jewish society faces in exile, and the promises God makes in response. Just as He established a covenant with Noah after the flood, He promises us that He will address both our barrenness and the storms that toss us. In one paradigm, God appears as our husband; in the other, He is our king. Both point toward the eternal bond between God and the Jewish people.

Yeshayahu captures that assurance in the closing verse of the first prophecy: *“For mountains may move, hills may crumble away; but My love for you will not be moved, nor My pact of peace crumble. So speaks the Lord, who cares for you.”* (v. 10).

Shabbat Shalom.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-noach-rabbi-brander-5787/?pfstyle=wp>

Bulbs from the Gaza Envelope Take Root at Derech Avot *

When educators and students from OTS's Derech Avot High School for boys visited the Gaza envelope earlier this year, they confronted the realities of October 7 firsthand. At Kibbutz Saad, they heard how the freezer of the kibbutz packing facility, normally used for onions and amaryllis bulbs, had been used to hold the bodies of people murdered in the attacks.

It was a sobering visit, but it also sparked a connection that offered hope. Moved by the visiting students and educators, Itzik Neichtler, a member of Kibbutz Saad who manages the packing house and its amaryllis branch, later contacted the school with an offer to donate bulbs for its grounds. Still carrying the weight of that day, he wanted to give something living in return for the light their visit had brought him.

These bulbs flower once a year, from Pesach until Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut, the days when Israel moves from remembering its fallen to celebrating its independence. This week, as schools across the OTS network marked the anniversary of October 7th, Derech Avot students planted the bulbs themselves, led by Neichtler, in memory of the soldiers who gave their lives defending others that day.

* From OTS (Ohr Torah Stone) Highlights of September 2026 (email)

Dvar Torah: Noah: The Koach of Noah

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2019 *

“These are the generations of Noah, Noah was a completely righteous man in his generation, Noah walked with Elochim.” (Breishis 6:9)

Noah lived in a stormy world, and that was even before the waters of the flood came along. The world around him was irredeemably saturated with corruption. HASHEM regretted having created mankind. Free will was a failed experiment, and HASHEM was ready to abort the entire creation if not for one man and his family, Noah. For some reason he found grace in the eyes of HASHEM. The Holy Torah titles Noah with adjectives any one of us would be thrilled to approximate, *“a completely righteous man.”*

The \$64,000 question is how he was able to remain untouched and pure like rain in a world whose values were hostile to everything he lived for. It's a profoundly relevant question. Just how did he do it!?

It could be that the hint is right there at the very beginning of the verse, *“These are the generations of Noah, Noah.”* The Mishne in Pirke Avos states a spiritual principle, *“A Mitzvah generates another Mitzvah and Aveivas produce Aveiros.”* There is momentum to our behavior and choices and like with any muscle there is a strengthening that results from exercising a given limb.

"These are the generations of Noach, Noach..." Noach means calmness. Noach, the man specialized in the trait of "noach," calmness. He was not reactive to the world around. When one is reactive they are being controlled and shaped by their environment. They have forfeited their freedom largely to circumstance. When a person chooses to act rather than react then they are free to decide what is the right thing to do.

The more this power of "noach is exercised the stronger it becomes. Noach was the master of this trait "noach," calmness, which afforded him to be the master of his destiny.

There is a dispute among behavioral psychologists. When the rat in the Skinnerian box performs the correct task the psychologist rewards him with a treat. In the exchange the psychologist is telling the rat, "Good rat! You're doing a great job!"

It can be seen through a different lens. When the rat gets the reward for his performance, the rat may be saying to the psychologist, "Good psychologist! You're providing me the treat right on schedule!" It's a subtle matter. Who is training whom!? Is the psychologist training the rat or is the rat training the psychologist?

As we navigate the world, we live with an illusion that we are unaffected by the culture around us. Ironically, so many who seek to express their individuality somehow manage to wear similar uniforms of nonconformity.

How does someone attain true independence?

Noach was not looking to directly influence the world around him. That feeds into another classic explanation of, "These are the generations of Noach, Noach..." and it also opens him up to criticism. Noach took care of Noach. The upside is that he remained uninfluenced by his generation. The downside is that he was unavailable to help people around him.

As an independent thinker, and as an historical actor (not a reactor), he was entirely available to, as the verse testifies, "...Noach walked with Elokim." That was the survival strategy, the legacy and also the Koach of Noach.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5780-noach/>

Noach: Noah, Superman and Global Warming

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2019 *

God creates a perfect, self-sustaining planet, teaming with life. God places human beings in it and gives them seemingly divine powers: rule over all living things, and the ability to build, create, transform, and take mastery over the entire planet (Breishit 1:28-29). God demands from them only that they accept some limits and understand that their mastery and control cannot be complete; with every six days of creating comes one day of surrendering control; with the mandate to work the land comes the obligation to protect it as its custodians (2:15). But human beings are not able to live by these restrictions. Appetite and greed drive their actions (3:6). They become mighty and powerful; they believe everything is theirs for the taking: the property of others (6:11), women whom they covet (6:2), and even human life itself (4:8). Even those who do not perpetrate these evils are complicit (Rashi, 6:13). Their own shortsightedness and self-centeredness — or simply their cowardice or apathy — allow them to ignore what is happening, to convince themselves that it is not their business and that trying to do something about it would be pointless. They become passive enablers, the evil continues to flourish, and the entire land becomes morally corrupt.

God realizes that there is no choice but to start again, to bring a flood, recreate the world, and hope that this time, with more guidance, humanity will get it right. Noah works on the ark for 120 years. Maybe he could have done a better job trying to warn people, but his tireless efforts make it clear to anyone listening that he is announcing the end of the world. But this is a message no one is interested in hearing. Even when the rains begin, when the evidence is before their eyes and the water is up to their ankles and knees, they refuse to believe that God will allow the world to be destroyed (Rashi, 7:12). When the flooding starts, when the storms are out of control and their fate is sealed, they finally want to repent; they will do anything to be saved. But by then it is too late.

We tend to react with an air of superiority and incredulity when we hear this story: How wicked must these people have been to act as they did! How stupid to be so willingly blind to their fate! I remember having a similar reaction as a kid, many years ago when I was an avid reader of Superman comics.

In the origin story, Jor-El, Superman's father, investigates the frequent volcanic explosions on Krypton, his home planet. Realizing that its core will soon explode and destroy the entire planet, he urges the leaders to build spaceships to save their civilization, but the council refuses to believe him.

Who is willing to seriously face the possibility that their planet is on a path to destruction? As he tells his wife, "Because of their stupidity, a world will die!" In the end, he is only able to build one small spaceship. He puts his baby son, Kal-El, on it and sends him to Earth, where the boy will grow up to become Superman.

This is a Noah story, even if I didn't recognize it at the time. What I do remember thinking was how incredibly stupid and short-sighted the planet's leaders were. How could anyone not take such warnings seriously? With the fate of their planet hanging in the balance, even if they did not care about anyone else, wouldn't their concern for their own safety and that of their families compel them to heed the warnings?

But now, sadly, the lack of response and willing blindness fail to shock me, for I see them every day in how we, particularly we Americans, are responding to our own flooding and impending planetary disaster. I am referring, of course, to global warming and climate change. These things are incontrovertible facts, and it does not require trust in scientists to accept them as such. The evidence is before our eyes:

*polar-bear-ice-water*It can be seen in pictures of polar bears stranded on tiny ice floes. It can be seen in thinning, receding glaciers, like those I saw in the Canadian Rockies last year. It can be seen in the weather, the unprecedented heat waves and hottest years on record, in the droughts, hurricanes, blizzards, and tornadoes. And it can be seen in flooding, which has caused hundreds of deaths, billions of dollars of damage, and impacted millions of lives. Every day the ice caps are melting, rain is falling, storms and floods are increasing, and the water is rising ever higher, and we, like the generation of Noah, go about as if nothing is happening.

Some carry more blame than others. The energy companies have devoted tremendous resources to disputing the evidence and spreading misinformation and to quashing U.S. efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Politicians support and further these efforts by publicly denying climate change, even while many of them acknowledge the reality in private. They are driven by power, greed, or simply cowardice, knowing that they would be attacked or even ousted by their own party if they were to act differently. But we are all complicit: every one of us who uses goods produced by industries that emit high levels of carbon dioxide; every one of us who eats beef on a regular basis; every one of us who decides that there is nothing to be done and throws up our hands in resignation to the fact that our planet is on a path of self-destruction.

One deeply depressing fact — among so many others — from this election season is that climate change was barely addressed in the debates. What does it mean that we as a country can spend hours challenging our candidates on the core issues for our future and treat climate change — the one issue on which the future of the planet depends — as an afterthought?

As this election season draws to a close, let us take some serious time to reflect on how we can elect representatives and leaders who embrace the divine mandate to protect the world, who will work tirelessly to ensure that the world remains good and life-sustaining, that we will have a planet to pass down to our children and grandchildren, leaders who are willing to take courageous stands, telling people what they don't want to hear, forcing people to change their habits and practices before it is too late, before the doors of the ark close and it floats away forever.

God has taken an oath that God would no longer bring another flood to destroy the world. God will not send another flood, and God will not send another Noah. It is all in our hands now. We will either bring the next flood, or we will save ourselves from it. But the water is rising, and we must act before it is too late. We must be the custodians of the world that God has charged us to be.

Shabbat Shalom!

* The role of humans in global warming or climate change is controversial. Long periods of warming and cooling of the planet have a long history. My including this column does not imply my agreeing or disagreeing with any particular position on the question of the role of humans on affecting the global climate.

From my archives.

Insights from Chassidic Tradition
Did It Really Happen? What Makes Torah Torat Emet
By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

Parshat Noach tells the story of a world destroyed by a flood and a family entrusted with preserving life. Noach builds the *teivah*, brings his family and the animals inside, and waits for the waters to recede. When they emerge, they must begin again.

Alongside the story comes a familiar question: did it really happen? For many readers, this question reaches beyond the Mabul. **What does believing a Torah narrative require of us?** Must we affirm that its events occurred exactly as described? And if we struggle to do so, what does that mean for our faith? These questions can be painful when our attachment to Torah runs deeper than our ability to resolve our doubts. [emphasis added]

A conversation I once overheard in shul offered an intriguing answer. I have changed the names and reconstructed the exchange.

“Do you think the Mabul really happened?” Eitan asked.

“Absolutely,” Shulamit replied.

“Really? Where?”

“In the Torah.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that the story is true. It teaches us something about God and how we should live. Whether it also describes an event that happened somewhere in the world is a different question.”

Eitan was unconvinced. I kept thinking about her answer.

Shulamit was distinguishing between historical truth and religious truth. **Historical truth asks whether an event occurred as described. Religious truth asks what the Torah reveals through its telling.** She was affirming the latter without deciding the former. “It happened in the Torah” was, for her, a substantial affirmation of faith. [emphasis added]

That answer can be startling. We generally assume that calling a story true means affirming that its events occurred. Shulamit was locating its religious truth in the divine teaching the story carries.

This past Monday was my father’s *yahrzeit*. He lived the Chassidut I have spent years trying to understand. Watching him drew me to its teachings, even though he himself had little interest in studying them.

My father was a deeply spiritual Chassid, with little interest in explaining Chassidut intellectually. He experienced it. God’s presence was palpable to him, including in those around him. His Chassidut gave his affection a spiritual depth: caring for another person was part of living close to God. He adored my mother, cherished his children, and cared deeply about

others, Jews and non-Jews alike. As his child, I experienced something of his spiritual world through the tenderness with which he treated us. I miss that tenderness, and I miss him.

He never articulated this theology. But his way of being religious drew me toward Chassidic thought, where I found language for something I had first known through him.

One strand of that thought helps me take Shulamit's answer seriously. At its heart is the desire to draw close to God. Chassidut asks how learning Torah, observing mitzvot, and going about our daily lives can deepen that closeness. God's presence fills the world; being religious means becoming attentive to that presence and letting it shape how we live.

Torah belongs at the center of this work. **The Torah is not a book of history. It is Torat Hashem: divine teaching that guides us in living as Jews and drawing close to God. Its stories serve that purpose. Their religious truth lies in what God teaches through them; the historical questions are beside the point.** [emphasis added]

We therefore study the stories' details carefully. Through the characters' choices, struggles, and encounters with God, the Torah teaches us how to live before Him. Reading becomes a way of confronting what that teaching demands of us and what we must change in ourselves.

Someone who believes that every event happened exactly as narrated can read it this way. So can someone who struggles with that belief. The historical question need not be settled for either reader to receive the narrative as Torah.

There is an audacious claim here: the Torah's teaching remains true and authoritative without our having to settle the historical questions. Those questions can remain open while our commitment to what the Torah teaches is wholehearted. We can hear God speaking through the story and take its demands seriously, even as we continue to grapple with its history.

Understood this way, Torah brings us into a relationship with God. Learning becomes a way of hearing what He asks of us and deepening our service of Him. [emphasis added]

Consider revelation. The giving of Torah continues beyond Sinai: God continues to speak through Torah, and through learning we receive His teaching. Chazal's interpretations participate in that ongoing revelation. The central religious concern is our receiving of Torah: can we hear God addressing us through what we learn? The historical question about what happened at Sinai can remain unanswered while this encounter becomes real in our lives.

Consider Moshe. Torah and Chazal portray him as a person whose extraordinary closeness to God accompanies profound humility. Through him, we learn what spiritual greatness asks of a human being. The historical details of Moshe's life are beside the point here. What matters is what the Torah teaches us through him, and how that teaching can deepen our own service of God.

This brings us back to Noach. The Mabul confronts us with a world corrupted by human violence. Inside the teivah, preserving life requires patient, daily care. Afterward, the survivors must learn to inhabit the world again. Reading this story as Torah means recognizing that we are answerable to God for how we treat His creation, how we protect the vulnerable, and the world we help bring into being.

My father understood that responsibility through the people he cared for. Remembering him this week, I want to read Noach with something of his attentiveness to holiness, and let the Torah's truth deepen the care we bring to one another.

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/10/beginning-again-the-torah-we-have-yet-to-hear/>

When Righteousness Isn't Enough: Thoughts for Parashat Noah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In the first verse of this week's Parasha, Noah is introduced as a righteous (tsadik) and whole-hearted (tamim) man. He was unique in his generation when *"the earth was filled with violence."* The Almighty decided to wipe out humanity but to spare Noah and family. He commanded Noah to build an ark and provided exact specifications of what needed to be done. The Torah informs us that *"Noah did according to that which God commanded him."*

But then the Torah continues with God's instruction to Noah to enter the ark with his family, *"for I have seen you as righteous (tsadik) before Me in this generation."* Although Noah had followed God's commands exactly, he was now called tsadik (righteous) but no longer tamim (whole-hearted). It seems that God noticed a defect in Noah's behavior and demoted him accordingly.

But what was the defect? Noah had done exactly as commanded. Why was he no longer tamim? Why was he no longer described as being *"whole-hearted?"*

What is the chief characteristic of a tsadik? A tsadik acts with tsedek, justice. Rules are followed, commitments are kept. The Talmud (Pesachim 8a-b) discusses the case of a father who prays for the health of an ill child. If the father states that he will give charity on condition that God will heal the child, the father is considered to be totally righteous (*tsadik gamur*). Yet, this prayer seems far from ideal. Why should the father be deemed righteous by making a bargain with God? Rabbi Hayyim Yosef Azulai, a great sage of the 18th century, commented: The father is righteous — but not pious. Righteousness entails making commitments and keeping them. The father strikes a bargain that he intends to fulfill exactly. But he lacks piety.

What is the chief characteristic of a *tamim*? **A tamim is whole-hearted, pure, pious.** A tamim doesn't simply follow rules but operates with a much larger religious vision. At the beginning of the Parasha, Noah is described as having both qualities — a tsadik and a tamim. When God commanded Noah to build the ark, he did so exactly as he was instructed. He was a tsadik. But **God had expected more than mere righteousness; He wanted whole-heartedness, love, piety.** Yes, Noah followed instructions; but why didn't he first pray to God and ask forgiveness for the people? Why didn't he demonstrate feelings of human solidarity? Why didn't he challenge God as Abraham and Moses did in later generations? [emphasis added]

Noah, in following the rules as a tsadik, did not maintain his quality of being a tamim. Religion demands both proper conduct and proper sentiment — adherence to the demands of justice and a grand religious vision characterized by love of God and humanity. God expected Noah — and us — to be not only righteous but to be whole-hearted, pure, loving, visionary. Are we up to it?

* 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/3504>

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Paired Perspectives on the Parashah:

Noah: The Tower of Babel

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

[Ed. note: read Rabbi Angel's outstanding Dvar Torah in conjunction with that of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, below.]

The Tower of Babel occupies only nine verses in the Torah, yet it is the only narrative between the Flood and the introduction of Abraham's family. Its prominent placement suggests that it marks a critical turning point in human history. However, the Torah never explicitly identifies the sin of the builders. What exactly did they do wrong, and why did God intervene so dramatically?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109a) maintains that the builders rebelled against God. Some sought to ascend to heaven and wage war against Him, while others intended to worship idols. Rabbi Nathan concludes that all of the builders were motivated by idolatry. This interpretation explains the severity of God's response, but it is difficult to establish from the biblical text itself. The people simply declare their intention to build a city and a tower reaching toward heaven, thereby making a name for themselves and preventing their dispersion (Genesis 11:4).

Ibn Ezra emphatically rejects the notion that the builders literally intended to ascend to heaven. They were not so foolish as to believe that a tower could reach God's dwelling place. Rather, they wanted to establish a permanent city, with an impressive tower serving as a landmark and a monument to their achievements. Their desire to remain together, however, conflicted with God's plan that humanity populate the entire earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). According to Ibn Ezra, the builders did not necessarily intend to rebel against God. They simply pursued their own aspirations without recognizing that these aspirations contradicted God's will.

Other commentators offer variations on these approaches. Radak and Bekhor Shor understand the refusal to disperse as a deliberate rejection of God's plan for people to populate the earth. Hizkuni and Netziv perceive a more sinister dimension in the people's insistence on unity, suggesting that their society suppressed individuality and freedom. These interpretations offer important insights into the dangers of human ambition and enforced conformity. Nevertheless, the biblical narrative does not explicitly identify any of these offenses.

The twentieth-century biblical scholar Umberto Cassuto offers a compelling interpretation by placing the narrative within its ancient Mesopotamian setting. His approach enables us to appreciate the significance of details that otherwise seem incidental, while also bringing us back to the Talmud's interpretation.

Ancient Babylonian cities featured monumental stepped towers known as ziggurats, associated with temples dedicated to their gods. These towers symbolically connected heaven and earth. The Babylonians viewed these sacred structures as symbolic meeting places between heaven and earth, where the divine realm could intersect with the human world. The towers thus reflected a religious worldview in which people sought to establish contact with, and exercise influence over, the divine realm.

The most famous Babylonian ziggurat was associated with the temple of Marduk in Babylon. Its name, Etemenanki, meant "House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." Babylonian traditions attributed the construction of the sacred complex to the gods themselves. The city of Babylon likewise was understood as Bab-ilim, "Gate of the God," reflecting its inhabitants' conviction that their city was a center of divine presence.

With this background, several unusual features of the Torah's account become intelligible. Why does the narrative devote an entire verse to the process of manufacturing bricks? Because monumental construction in Mesopotamia depended upon baked bricks rather than the stone commonly used elsewhere. Why does the Torah emphasize that the tower was built by human beings (Genesis 11:5)? Because Babylonian religious tradition attributed its sacred construction to the gods. Most strikingly, why does God need to "descend" to inspect a tower supposedly reaching heaven? **The Torah employs biting irony. No matter how impressive human architecture may be, it cannot bring people closer to God or compel Him to appear. God remains utterly transcendent and free.** [emphasis added]

Even the name Babylon becomes part of the Torah's theological critique. The Babylonians celebrated their city as the gateway to the divine realm. The Torah instead associates Babel with the Hebrew root balal, meaning confusion (Genesis 11:9). **What the Babylonians regarded as the center of cosmic order becomes, in the Torah's account, the place where human unity collapses.** [emphasis added]

Cassuto's interpretation thus illuminates the Talmud's striking assertion that the builders engaged in idolatry and rebellion against God. The Sages expressed their interpretation through the dramatic imagery of ascending to heaven and waging war against God. The ancient Near Eastern evidence suggests that their underlying theological insight was remarkably perceptive. **The builders sought to bridge the boundary between humanity and divinity through their own monumental achievements. Their error was not technological innovation itself, but the presumption that human beings could control access to God.** [emphasis added]

This interpretation also clarifies why the Tower of Babel appears immediately before the emergence of Abraham. Humanity's attempt to establish a religious center through its own power ends in confusion and dispersion. God then chooses Abraham to begin a different religious journey, one founded upon obedience to God rather than the manipulation of divine power. [emphasis added]

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3503>

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Double the Blessing

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

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

Noach did not have it easy. For 120 years before the Flood, he was tasked to build the Teiva in public so that people should ask about it. He was to explain that G-d was deeply disappointed with mankind and was planning a great flood to destroy the world. Instead of becoming a hero and celebrated savior of humankind, Noach was the laughingstock of the generation. Aside from Noach's immediate family, no one was interested in his message and being saved.

Then the Flood came.

During the time on the Teiva, Noach was tasked with caring for all the animals of the world. The world was destroyed because of selfishness, theft, and greed. For twelve months, Noach was tasked to care for the animals. He worked so hard that he was literally ill and exhausted, coughing blood and limping from being injured by the lion. Through his selflessness, dedication and perseverance, Noach rebuilt the moral foundation of the world.

After the Flood, Noach emerged from the Teiva. He chose his first project. He planted a vineyard. When grapes grew, he made wine. He drank and he became intoxicated. And in that intoxicated state he disgraced himself.

Noach was the world's greatest success story. He was an inventor and a righteous man. He survived the taunting of the generation; he survived the flood and saved his family too. All eyes were on him to see what his next move would be. Yet, at that moment of foundational opportunity, Noach checks out. He gets himself drunk and is barely heard from again. As the commentaries explain: Instead of being great, he became quite ordinary. (Rashi 9:20)

The story of Noach is the story of every successful person. It takes perseverance and dedication to overcome the challenges and disregard the nay sayers. It takes selflessness to become righteous and great. And then when success is

finally achieved, the next move is what really matters. Some people then feel entitled. Yet, the hope is to be able to go from strength to strength, from one blessing to the next.

I once met a man who was very wealthy and gave large sums to Tzedaka. Whenever he celebrated a Bar Mitzva for a son or grandson, he paid the caterer and the venue and then designated an equal amount to Tzedaka. He would call the Bar Mitzva boy into his office and have a conversation about where the Tzedaka funds in honor of the Bar Mitzva should be given.

What was not well known was that he did the same thing for every Chasuna and Sheva Brachos. The amount that was spent on his own simcha was the amount he would give to Tzedaka in honor of the occasion. When one of his daughters got engaged and some people in the family were pushing for a totally over-the-top Sheva Brachos. He said, "No." It emerged that for every simcha he was giving double, and the over-the-top Sheva Brachos simply wasn't part of his budget.

I asked him what his understanding of Maaser is. Most people understand Maaser as a limit as to how much a person should give.

He replied:

"Maaser is a guide. If a person can't do more, Maaser satisfies the Tzedaka obligation."

"But when people are spending anyway on all kinds of upgrades, there is nothing wrong with spending on helping others."

"In the journey of life, I have been successful. Now it is time to double the blessing and share it with others."

Noach's first project after success was not one of greatness. The wine that Noach produced left him intoxicated and left him small. But the lesson he leaves us is big. We yearn to use the wine of our lives for Kiddush, and to make a L'Chayim to benefit others.

For Family Discussion:

- After a win, like a good grade, a promotion, or a finished project, what's our usual next move? What could it be?
- The wine left Noach small, yet the essay says we can use our successes for Kiddush and L'Chayim. What's one blessing in our family right now that we could "double" by sharing it?

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 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, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshas Noach

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

Our parsha begins with G-d instructing Noach to build a large three-story ark to prepare for a flood which G-d will bring in one hundred and twenty years to wipe away humanity. Rash"i asks why Hashem wanted Noach to toil so long and so hard? He explains that G-d's intent was to avert the flood by inspiring the people of Noach's generation to repent. When they would see Noach working on this huge project, they would surely ask what he was doing. This would give Noach

plenty of opportunity to explain how humanity had abandoned G-d's intent for the world, and that G-d is planning to bring a flood that will wipe out all life on land. Perhaps, hearing and seeing Noach over the next one hundred and twenty years would be enough inspiration to bring them to change their ways and would avert the pending decree of destruction. (Bereishis 7:14)

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

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

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

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

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

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

From my archives.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Messages from Israel During a Dangerous Period: Why Israel Will Overcome!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[Ed. note: I am reprinting what I shared from Rabbi Ovadia three years ago, shortly after the vicious attack and

murders from Hamas. We must remember the evil from our enemies as well as the heroic actions of our people. With elections in both the U.S. and Israel upcoming in the next few weeks, keep history in mind.]

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

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

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

We should not shave or take a haircut.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This, we will not let happen!

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

Your bloods, Arabia, the murderous, do not come of a source of pure gold, it is not as my bloods which were distilled by prophecy and poverty! it comes from the bloods of your foxes in the vineyards, the bite of their teeth, from the venom of asps and secrecy of scorpions. I dreamt and still I am dreaming: Yerushalayim is built on paved streets, on asphalt the

Shekhina strolls not on ruins among caves between one and another donkey vineyards in its mountains, olives and all kinds of fruit trees, many children at the homes and many animals in the pasture - -

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

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

From an Israeli Father:

A letter from dad:

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

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

The victims of the mob attacks in Israel, the pogroms of the diaspora, and the persecutions all over the world maintained their Judaism despite everything. Even though they were slaughtered because of their faith and had no way to retaliate. All of them, together with beautiful Suleika of the Maghreb and Moyshe'le of the ghetto, his hands raised, are crying out to you, whispering behind your shoulders: Win!

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

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

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

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

To be the Wife of a Soldier, Right Now

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

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

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

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

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

It is to force feed yourself because there is no choice, though you have no appetite.
It is to hear of another soldier and another soldier who were killed and fight the horrible thoughts in your head.
It is to wait for a whole day or days for one phone call, which ends in minutes, and it is not enough for you.
It is to quietly cry when he says he must hang up, to sound calm and uplift his spirit, while in reality I am crying, not wanting the call to end.
It is to convey strength and faith when in your heart you only want to cry.
It is to do things that make you feel good, even if they are small or marginal, because anyway your heart is shrinking.
It is to be an optimist, to imagine the crazy trip we are going to take when all this is over, the amazing Hodaya (thanksgiving) Party, the Shabbat together, vacation.
It is to trust him, believe in him, know that he is the best there is and let him know that.
It is to believe in HaShem who protects and accompanies him.
It is difficult, it rattles you, it is exhausting.
It is a mission, it is a Zchut, it is strength, it is faith.
To be the wife of a soldier right now is simply being there for him, and for you!

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, Rabbi, Beth Shalom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

Last week, we started the Torah again from the very beginning. We read about the creation of the world, and then about humanity being expelled from Gan Eden.

Throughout the book of Bereishit, we will see humanity striving to find its way back, trying to repair what was broken and bring the world closer to the way it was meant to be.

This week's parashah, Parashat Noach, introduces us to a man whose father names him Noach, expressing the hope that he will bring comfort and redemption to a broken world. Noach represents the hope that things can change, that the world can be repaired, and that we can build something better.

But that change doesn't happen on its own. It takes people who are willing to show up, take responsibility, and do their part.

As we begin another year of reading the Torah, we are reminded that the story of Bereishit is not just about how the world began. It is also about the responsibility we have to make the world a better place. That starts with the small things we do every day: showing up for one another, investing in the next generation, and carrying forward the values of those who came before us. [emphasis added]

We may not be able to fix the whole world on our own, but each of us can do something to make it better. And when we do that together, as a community, we can accomplish so much more.

B'ahavat Yisrael,
Rabbi Netanel

[Ed.:] On Simchat Torah, the shlichim, Roni and Ariel, Tomer and Arbel HaCohen, said good-bye to the shul after three special years in Auckland, as they return home to Israel. Roni and Ariel left Israel for New Zealand on October 8, 2023 – almost immediately after one of the worst days in the history of our people – and quickly became a part of the AHC community. AHC reports this week that the new shlichim will be arriving in New Zealand on October 21. The annual Kristallnacht Commemorative Concert in Auckland on November 10 will celebrate the extraordinary Holocaust survivors and refugees who found sanctuary in New Zealand and transformed the nation's classical music landscape.

* 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 now Rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community in Canberra, the capitol city of Australia. I hope to be able to include his Torah insights soon.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher>.

Rav Kook Torah

Noah: The Rainbow in the Clouds

After the Flood, God informed Noah:

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

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

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

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

Pre-Flood Morality

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

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

Greater Moral Guidance

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

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

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

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

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

Noach: A Tale of Four Cities (5771, 5784)

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

[Ed. note: read Rabbi Sack's insightful *Dvar Torah* in conjunction with that of Rabbi Hayyim Angel, above.]

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

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

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

The first act begins with the first two human children. Cain and Abel both bring offerings to God. God accepts Abel's, not Cain's. Cain in anger murders Abel. God confronts him with his guilt: "*Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.*" Cain's punishment was to be a "*restless wanderer on the earth.*" Cain then "*went out from the Lord's Presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*" We then read:

*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. He [Cain] built a city, naming it **Enoch** after his son. Gen. 4:17*

The first city was founded by the first murderer, the first fratricide. The city was born in blood. [emphasis added]

There is an obvious parallel in the story of the founding of Rome by Romulus who killed his brother Remus, but there the parallel ends. The Rome story – of children fathered by one of the gods, left to die by their uncle, and brought up by wolves – is a typical founding myth, a legend told to explain the origins of a particular city, usually involving a hero, bloodshed, and the overturning of an established order. The story of Cain is not as founding myth because the Bible is not interested in Cain's city, nor does it valorise acts of violence. It is the opposite of a founding myth. It is a critique of cities as such. **The most important fact about the first city, according to the Bible, is that it was built in defiance of God's will.** Cain was sentenced to a life of wandering, but instead he built a town. [emphasis added]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It turns out that there are no innocent men. Three times – “all the townsmen,” “young and old,” “all the people from every quarter” – the text emphasises that without exception, every man was a would-be perpetrator of the crime.

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

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

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

Likewise the idea of a tower that “*reaches to heaven*” describes an actual phenomenon, the ziqqurat or sacred tower that dominated the skyline of the cities of the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley. The ziqqurat was an artificial holy mountain, where the king interceded with the gods. The one at Babylon to which our story refers was one of the greatest, comprising seven stories, over three hundred feet high, and described in many non-Israelite ancient texts as “reaching” or “rivalling” the heavens.

Unlike the other three city stories, the builders of Babel commit no obvious sin. In this instance the Torah is much more subtle. Recall what the builders said:

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches to the heavens, and make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the earth.” Gen. 11:4

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

The second mistake lay in wanting to make “*a tower that reaches to the heavens.*” One of the basic themes of the creation narrative in Bereishit 1 is the separation of realms. There is a sacred order. There is heaven and there is earth and the two must be kept distinct:

“The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth He has given to the children of men.” Ps. 115:16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Around the Shabbat Table (Questions to Ponder)

1. What do you think the sin of the builders of the Tower of Babel was?
2. Do you think cities today support the argument made in this essay about the potential for evil in cities?
3. How can we create large, flourishing cities where the residents are more righteous?

Because Likutei Divrei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, among other compilations, reprint columns by Rabbi Sacks for the current and last year, I select a different Dvar Torah from a different year. Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/a-tale-of-four-cities/>

Who Was Terah?

By Yehuda Altein *

Terah (also spelled Terach) was the father of Abraham, the first Patriarch of the Jewish nation. Although Terah worshipped idols and raised his family in the idolatrous city of Haran, his son Abraham independently recognized the existence of one true G d, and eventually left his father's home for the Land of Israel.

Terah: Biography in Brief

Scripture provides few details of Terah's life.¹ He was born in the year 1878 from Creation (1883 BCE). His father was Nahor, who was eighth in line from Noah. Terah married a woman named Amathlai, daughter of Karnebo.² When he was seventy, his wife bore him a son named Abraham (then called Abram). Abraham was followed by two more sons, Nahor³ and Haran.⁴

Initially Terah lived in the Chaldean city of Ur Kasdim, but at one point he decided to journey to the Land of Canaan (better known by its later name, the Land of Israel).⁵ Accompanying him were Abraham, Abraham's wife Sarah (then called Sarai),

and Haran's son Lot. (Haran himself had died in Ur Kasdim, and Nahor apparently decided to remain behind.⁶) Along the way they stopped in the city of Haran,⁷ where they decided to stay.

According to some traditions, Terah originally lived in Haran and that is where Abraham was born. He then relocated to Ur Kasdim, before ultimately returning to Haran.⁸

When Terah was 145 years old, Abraham and Sarai continued on to the Land of Canaan at G d's directive. Terah himself died in Haran 60 years later, in the year 2083 from Creation (1678 BCE), at the age of 205.

Terah and Nimrod

Midrashic sources⁹ provide deeper insight into Terah's life.

Nimrod, king of Babylon, appointed him Chief General of his armed forces, making Terah the highest official in the land, beloved and respected by all.

On the night of Abraham's birth, Terah's friends and servants gathered in his house to celebrate. As they left his home, they looked up to the sky and saw a large star ascend from the east and swallow four stars from the four corners of the sky. They understood this to mean that Terah's new son would ultimately conquer the land and vanquish his enemies.

When Nimrod heard, he summoned Terah to his palace and commanded he bring his son to be killed, promising vast riches in return. Terah cleverly attempted to sway the king's mind.

"Let me first relate what else happened last night," he said. "Someone approached me and offered me a huge sum of money to sell my best horse, which His Majesty gave me as a gift. Would you suggest I agree to the deal?"

"That would be ridiculous," Nimrod replied. "You are quite wealthy, and nothing can replace the horse I gave you, which is the best in the land!"

"This is precisely what you are asking of me," Terah argued. "What can money do to replace my own child?"

Furious, Nimrod threatened, "If you do not bring me your child, I will kill your entire family!"

Terah was undeterred. He secretly hid Abraham in a cave together with his mother and wet nurse, and provided them with food on a monthly basis. This is where young Abraham spent the first few years of his life.

Terah the Idol Worshipper

Scripture recounts that Terah worshipped idols.¹⁰ Here, too, the Midrash¹¹ fills in additional details.

Not only did Terah worship idols, but he even operated a business selling deities. Once, Terah needed to leave his store, and he appointed Abraham to sell the idols in his stead. However, Abraham discouraged potential customers from buying the idols, explaining to them the futility of worshipping statues that were only fashioned that very day.

Not satisfied with this, Abraham took an ax and destroyed all but one of his father's idols. He took the ax and placed it in the hand of the largest idol, the only one that remained intact. When Terah returned and saw what had happened, he accused Abraham. But Abraham explained that the largest idol had broken all the others in a fight over an offering that a woman had brought to the store. Terah exclaimed that such a thing was impossible. He then realized that his son had tricked him into admitting that his idols were powerless.

Terah reported his son to Nimrod, and the king sentenced Abraham to death by burning. Abraham was thrown into a fiery furnace, but miraculously he remained unscathed. Meanwhile, Abraham's brother Haran was unsure with whom to side, Abraham or Nimrod. He decided that he would join whichever party emerged victorious. When Abraham was saved from the flames, Haran proclaimed that he belonged to Abraham's camp. He was duly thrown into the furnace and died.

The Midrash recounts that Terah was a stargazer, and he saw in the stars that his son Haran would be burned.¹²

Terah's Later Years

When Abraham's son Isaac was weaned, Terah traveled from Haran to the Land of Canaan to celebrate with his son.¹³

According to one source, in his later years, Terah married an additional wife, Pelilah, who bore him a son named Tzova.¹⁴

Although Terah spent many years worshipping idols, he ultimately repented, recognizing the futility of his previous way of life and embracing monotheism.¹⁵

Some say that Terah was the first person in history to mint coins.¹⁶

The Terah-Abraham Paradox

How Abraham came to be born from a father like Terah is puzzling indeed.¹⁷ One might think that traits such as righteousness and virtue are hereditary, and one must be born to devout and pious parents to have them.

Abraham teaches us that this is not necessarily the case. Our souls are literally a part of G d, and we thus possess unlimited potential, regardless of any outside factors. For this reason, it is possible for the soul of a lofty individual to be born to uncouth or evil parents.¹⁸

Moreover, Kabbalah teaches that the lower an entity falls, the higher its source. (An analogy is given from a wall that collapses. The higher the stone on the wall, the further it will land from its original position.) Thus, the fact that Abraham was born to such lowly parents indicates his tremendous greatness.¹⁹

FOOTNOTES:

1. Unless otherwise noted, the details in this section are taken from Genesis 11:24–32.
 2. Bava Batra 91a.
 3. Not to be confused with his grandfather of the same name.
 4. This is the order in which they are listed in Scripture. However, see Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 69b) that Abraham may have actually been the youngest son, and Scripture lists them in order of their wisdom.
- It should be noted that Haran was not born from Amathlai but from a different wife (Rashi to Genesis 20:12).
5. Some say that Terah and his forefathers originated from Canaan (Rashi to Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 44b).
 6. According to a differing view (see Nachmanides cited in fn. 8), Nahor had been living in Haran beforehand.
 7. Not to be confused with Haran, son of Terah. (In the original Hebrew, the two are spelled differently: Haran the person is spelled with a hei — **הָרָן**, while Haran the city is spelled with a chet — **חָרָן**.)

8. Nachmanides to Genesis 11:28. See, however, *Gevurot Hashem* ch. 5 for a dissenting opinion.
 9. The details in this section are taken from Seder Hadorot, year 1948 (quoting Sefer Hayashar).
 10. Joshua 24:2.
 11. Unless otherwise noted, the details in this section are taken from Bereishit Rabbah 38:13.
 12. Yalkut Shimoni, remez 77.
 13. Seder Hadorot, year 2050 (quoting Sefer Hayashar).
 14. Seder Hadorot, year 2075 (quoting Sefer Hayashar).
 15. Rashi to Genesis 15:15.
 16. Seder Hadorot, year 1878 (citing Shalshet Hakabbalah and Tzemach David).
 17. See Bamidbar Rabbah 19:1.
 18. Tanya, end of ch. 2.
 19. Or Hatorah: *Nevi'im U'Ketuvim*, vol. 1, p. 657.
- * Writer, translator, and editor from Brooklyn, NY.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4529921/jewish/Who-Was-Terah.htm

Noach: Unifying the Sun and the Moon

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky *

The Flood came to its complete end when the earth dried up. This occurred exactly one solar year (365 days) after the rain began.

The sun and moon symbolize our spiritual and mundane pursuits, respectively. The Torah and its commandments are like the sun in that they are self-illuminating; we feel G-d's presence when we engage in them. Mundane activities, in contrast, are like the moon, in that they do not possess their own intrinsic light. They only shine after we illuminate them with Divine consciousness.

The Flood is a metaphor for our engagement with the mundane aspects of reality and their potential to drown us in their pursuit, and therefore relates to the moon. The fact that the Flood lasted for a complete solar year indicates that it is the synthesis of the two modes – the sun (the spiritual) and the moon (the mundane) – that fulfills the purpose of creation, since the purpose of holiness and Divine consciousness is to permeate mundane reality, as well.

Thus, whenever we enter “lunar mode,” descending into the “floodwaters” of our mundane activities, we must illuminate them with the “sun,” the self-illuminating acts of studying the Torah and observing the commandments.

– From *Daily Wisdom* 3 *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos.

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291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 33, Issue 2

Shabbat Parashat Noach

5787 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

True Morality

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,

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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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Two Agnostics, but Only One is Righteous

"And Haran died before his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim." (Genesis 11:28) What is so significant about Haran, the brother of Abraham, that the Bible must provide a specific detail about his untimely death? And if it is important in order to give us the background of Abram's adoption of his orphaned nephew Lot, why must we be informed as to the precise place that Haran died, in Ur Kasdim? The Midrash fills in the missing information, and expands on Haran's life as well as providing the reason for his premature death. Our sages also contrast the personality of Haran with that of Noah. It is precisely this analysis which provides us with an important response to the agnostic.

When it comes to questions of belief, the agnostic is the loneliest of all. On one side of the fence stands the atheist, confident in his rejection of God and often dedicated to the debunking of religion, which he considers to be 'the opiate of the masses'. On the other side stands the believer, who glories in his faith that the universe is the handiwork of God. The agnostic stands in the middle, not knowing (agnostic) whether or not God exists, usually

despairing of the possibility of acquiring certitude about anything transcending observable material phenomena.

Noah is described as being righteous "in his generation" (Gen. 11:28). As previously discussed, some Talmudic rabbis see the qualification as great praise, while others find it to be somewhat of a slur: only in his generation could Noah be considered perfect; had he been born in the age of Abraham, he would not have been considered as worthy (Sanhedrin 109a; Rashi ad loc.).

Rashi seems to base the negative view toward Noah on a subsequent verse. Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and sons' wives, went into the ark "because of the waters of the flood." Rashi draws from this verse that "Noah had little faith; he believed and he didn't believe that the flood would arrive." He didn't enter the ark until the water literally pushed him in. The flood had to start before Noah actually made his move into the ark.

Rashi's phrase, "he believed and he didn't believe," is really another way of describing an agnostic who remains in the state of his uncertainty; he believes and doesn't believe.

Noah is therefore described by Rashi as the first agnostic, and herein lies his fatal flaw in comparison to Abraham, the founder of ethical monotheism. The second biblical agnostic appears in the guise of Haran – "These are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran" – at least as he is understood by the Midrash.

Lot, the son of Haran, is a significant figure in the Bible in his own right, and is brought up by Haran's brother, Abraham, when Haran dies. Why does the text specify, "and Haran died before his father in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim"? What is the importance of citing the exact place of Haran's death?

Rashi explains by citing a fascinating Midrashic tradition, and at the same time extracts Haran from relative anonymity and sets him up as a counterfoil agnostic to Noah. This particular midrash details how Terah, the father of the clan and a famous idol manufacturer, brings charges in the court of King Nimrod against his own son. He accuses Abram of being an iconoclast who destroyed his father's idols while preaching heretical monotheism. As punishment, Abram is to be cast into the fiery furnace. Haran is present at the trial and takes the position of having no position. He remains on the sidelines thinking that if Nimrod's furnace will prove hotter than Abram's flesh, he will side with the king; but if Abram survives the fire, then it would be clear that Abram's God is more powerful than

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Nimrod's gods, and he will throw in his lot with his brother.

Only after Abram emerges unscathed, is Haran ready to rally behind his brother. He confidently enters the fiery furnace (literally: Ur Kasdim), but no miracles await Haran. Haran burns to death.

Is it not strange that the fate of the two agnostics should be so different? We read how Noah was a man of little faith, and yet not only does he survive the Flood, but he turns into one of the central figures of human history. He is even termed righteous in the Bible. In contrast, Haran, father of Lot, brother to Abraham, hovers on the edge of obscurity, and is even punished with death for his lack of faith.

Why is Haran's agnosticism considered so much worse than Noah's?

Rabbi Moshe Besdin once explained that while Noah and Haran shared uncertainty about God, there is a vast difference between them. Noah, despite his doubts, did nevertheless build the ark, pounding away for 120 years, even suffering abuse from a world ridiculing his eccentric persistence. Noah may not have entered the ark until the rains began – but he did not wait for the Flood before obeying the divine command to build an ark! Noah may think like an agnostic, but he acts like a believer. Haran, on the other hand, dies because he waits for someone else to test the fires. In refusing to act for God during Abram's trial, he acted against God. In effect, his indecision is very much a decision. He is an agnostic who acts like an atheist.

We must understand that indecision is also a decision. A person who is indecisive about marrying a certain potential partner ultimately takes a negative decision by not 'popping the question'; an individual who is indecisive about protesting an evil action or a malicious statement is aiding and abetting the malevolence by his very indecisive silence. After all, our sages teach that 'silence is akin to assent' (*sh'tika k'hoda'a damya*).

Noah reached his spiritual level because he acted, not so much out of faith, but despite his lack of it. Our Sages understood very well the difficulty of faith and the phenomenon of agnosticism. What they attempt to teach the agnostic is: If you are unsure, why do you act as if you are an atheist? Would it not be wiser to act as if you were a believer?

We learn from Noah's life and Haran's death that perfect faith is not necessary in order to conduct one's life like a Jew. Belief is never as important as action. In the heaven of the Jews, there is room for all kinds of agnostics. It depends primarily on how they acted on earth.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Keep on Growing!

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 beitz" (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? Noach 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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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'erezt 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'erezt 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 three 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... *[Excerpted]*

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Those Who Rush to Build Paradise May Wake Up at the Mercy of Ham - Rabbi Sarel Rosenblatt

The story of Noah, Shem, and Japheth on utopia, innocence, and the alliance needed to protect the world from forces of destruction.

One of the most surprising narratives in the history of Noah takes place right after the Flood, upon leaving the Ark. Noah plants a vineyard, drinks wine, gets drunk, and finds himself completely naked. According to the Midrash, Ham exploits the situation and harms his father, while Shem and Japheth step in to save Noah and protect his dignity. As a result, Noah curses Ham and bestows a special blessing upon Shem and Japheth.

Why does Noah get drunk? How does this fit with his description as a "righteous and blameless man"? What is the significance of planting the vineyard, and what is the symbolic meaning of Noah's three sons and their actions?

We can find the key to this episode in the words of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 70a), from which it appears that Noah specifically planted a grapevine because it was the Tree of Knowledge, and Noah wanted to taste from the Tree of Knowledge! The Talmudic commentary serves as a direct continuation of the literal text (peshat), where we find numerous parallels and hints connecting Noah's story to the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

It turns out that upon leaving the Ark, Noah plants a tree just as God planted a tree—meaning he wishes to replant the Garden of Eden. If so, why did he seek drunkenness? Because intoxication is a loss of consciousness; Noah drank "until he no longer knew." Perhaps Noah simply wanted to achieve something straightforward: to undo the sin of the First Man. He thought that if Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge to gain awareness, he could now turn back the clock and surrender consciousness, hoping he would wake up to discover that humanity had returned to Paradise.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Yet Noah wakes up in the morning to discover that the world cannot return to Eden so quickly. More than that, anyone who tries to rush back to Paradise will find themselves exploited by others—even those closest to them. Ham exploits his father's vulnerability and harms him. As long as the world holds urges, temptations, weakness, sedition, and evil, the attempt to leap back to Eden is not only naive, it is dangerous.

Those who understand this are Shem and Japheth. Their act of kindness embodies the realization that "the world is built on kindness" (olam chesed yibaneh), and that rebuilding human culture requires grace and morality, not just grand dreams untethered from reality.

In this sense, Noah is a symbol of individuals and movements driven by lofty, sublime ideologies—a world where everything is good, and everything will be fine if we just implement the right "progress," spark a revolution, dismantle normal life structures, and declare that we are already in Paradise. But these visionaries fail to see that they are being exploited by cynical operators who use them merely to achieve their own ends.

Noah curses Ham's descendants to be slaves—meaning they must not succeed in executing their destructive cynicism, which preys upon good, innocent people. Standing opposite Ham are his two brothers, Japheth and Shem, whom Noah blesses with the words: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem... May God expand Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem."

Japheth possesses beauty, but Shem knows how to make the Divine Presence (Shechinah) dwell in the world. To Japheth belongs aesthetics, wisdom, and science—the bedrock of Western civilization. Our Sages knew how to appreciate this, giving a prominent place to Greek culture (traditionally associated with Japheth) because it expresses a high-level civilization. Yet the Semitic tradition of the Jewish people asks a different category of questions—questions of morality, values, and meaning. The Western-Japhetic tradition asks: What? How much? How does it work? The Jewish-Semitic tradition asks: Why? What is the meaning? What are the right values, and how do we manage a world with respect for the other and moral responsibility? How do we transform the world into a place where God can dwell?

With these blessings, Noah does not merely bless Japheth and Shem separately; he leaves them a testament. They must join forces, recognizing the wholeness born of learning from one another, so they can stand firm against Ham's attempts to exploit the innocence of dreamers who long to reach Paradise but find themselves manipulated time

and again. Ideally, the role of Japheth and Shem is to successfully educate and repair the world so that even those who follow in Ham's footsteps will ultimately mend their ways.

Just as then, so too today. All around us, we hear those who fantasize about an idyllic paradise without factoring in reality. We witness the forces and movements that exploit these dreamers simply to strike at them and at the entire civilization of goodness and morality. Today, too, we must remember Noah's testament after waking from his stupor—the charge he gave to Japheth and Shem to forge an alliance so that we might increase light over darkness, good over evil, and justice and morality over violence and ruin.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Moshe More Beloved Than Noah

I. Moshe is more beloved (chaviv) than Noah; Noah, after having been called an ish tzaddik (6:19), was called ish adama (9:20), while Moshe, [by contrast,] after having been called ish mitzri (Shemos 2:19), was called ish HaElokim (Devarim 33:1) (Breishis Raba 36:3).

The Meshech Chochma (Breishis 9:20) explains that there are two ways to serve Hashem. One way is to serve Hashem exclusively, in isolation (misbodeid). Another is one who is involved in the needs of the community, who sacrificed himself for the sake of the klal and renounced (was mafkir) his soul for them.

Logically, one would think that the first type will ascend higher and higher, and the second will descend from his level, as is recorded in the medrash (Kohes Raba 7:7) "I learned eighty halachos, but due to my involvement in the needs of the tzibbur I forgot them".

Nonetheless, Noah, who isolated himself and did not rebuke the people of his generation, deserved to be destroyed, and was saved only by the grace of Hashem (6:8). Moreover, he descended from being a righteous man to being a man of the earth (6:9; 9:20), a drunkard.

By contrast, Moshe went from an Egyptian man (Shemos 2:19) who sacrificed himself in Egypt to save a Jew (2:11-15), to a man of Hashem (Devarim 33:1). He reached the highest level that a person can attain just before his death, much higher than Noah.

II. On Shemini Atzeres, the day when the parsha of the death of Moshe, the man of Hashem, is read in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Moshe Hauer zt"l passed away. Like his namesake, he sacrificed himself, and the even higher level of

Torah he could have achieved, for the sake of the klal. Like Moshe, he was a faithful shepherd to his flock, in his own shul and in the Orthodox community of Baltimore. Over twenty years ago, he worked bravely, like Moshe, to protect potential victims, throughout the country and the world.

As soon as he undertook the leadership of national Orthodoxy at the O.U., his unique talents enabled a more unified and proper response to the COVID-19 crisis. He displayed outstanding insight, sensitivity and discretion in dealing with thorny issues facing the community. He spoke and wrote with uncommon passion and clarity and represented us with great ingenuity and dignity to the world at large.

His final mission, to lead and unite us precisely two years since Shemini Atzeres 5784, was a fitting capstone to a remarkable career as a public servant. Eerily, his Shabbos Shuva O.U. Torah message began "Mi yichyeh u'mi yamus, mi b'kitzo u'mi lo b'kitzo - Who will live and who will die? Who will die at the predestined time and who before that time?" Titled "Unfinished Business?", Rav Hauer's message "reminds us of our vulnerability and of the possibility that one may leave this world with unfinished business". Moshe's business was unfinished, because he did not lead us into Eretz Yisroel.

"It is not your responsibility to finish the job, nor may you neglect it (Avos 2:21). 'Moshe may have had an unfulfilled dream for himself and Klal Yisrael, but he continued to work until his last day towards its fulfillment'. 'That is the true meaning of a complete life, not one that reaches its every goal but one that continues the march towards that goal'.

Tragically, Rav Moshe Hauer lived till only sixty, half the age of Moshe Rabbeinu. His shocking and untimely demise came only two days after we read in Kohes (9:8) "let your garments always be white". Rashi (Shabbos 153a) explains "your soul pure and clean". One must repent every day, for it may be his last.

Rav Hauer's petirah leaves a gaping hole in our hearts and in the leadership of our community. His passing reminds each and every one of us to help our respective communities and to repent every day.

"All those who are faithfully involved in the needs of the community, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give them their reward". Rav Moshe Hauer's life on this earth was cut short. As his pure and clean soul ascends on high, Hashem will certainly give him the reward he so richly deserved. May our being inspired by his example be an additional merit for his holy neshama.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

To Make the World a Better Place

You shall make a skylight for the ark, and to a cubit you shall finish it to the top, and the entrance of the ark you shall place in its side; you shall make it with bottom, second story, and third story. (Breishis 6:16)

bottom [compartments], second-story, and third-story. three stories, one above the other; the upper compartments were for people, the middle ones for [animal] dwellings, and the bottom ones for waste matter. — Rashi

That Noah's Ark had three floors, one for people, and one for animals, and another for garbage is pretty generic and banal information that every child is aware of. Yet, there lurks a wondrous question within that probably most of us have never considered.

I was desperately looking for a way to motivate a certain class of 7th grade boys to keep their class neat and clean. It's no secret that students think and learn better in a tidy workspace. I tried straight talk and appointing monitors, but one went nowhere and the other spilled over to a new kind of chaos. I called on a young Rabbi, a colleague, a principal who is a master in educational matters to help me solve this chronic problem. He said he would come into the class and we could work it out together. He entered that class, and he started a dialogue with me whereby the boys were able to eavesdrop on our conversation.

He asked if I remember a certain unfortunate incident that happened in another school where we worked together. It's hard to even say it out loud, because it was so below the dignity of the institution, or any standards of normalcy. I cannot even spell out the details here. Suffice it to say that it had to do with garbage and a window. Yes, there was a victim below who was upset and rightfully so. My colleague asked me if I remember what we did. I remember being too disturbed to talk to him at the time.

He told me in front of the class, that he spoke with that boy. "I asked him how many floors were on Noah's Teva and he told me three. I asked him what the levels were for and he said the people, the animals, the garbage.

I asked him why there was a necessity for a floor just for garbage. It's one entire floor out of three. After a year of holding onto garbage it must have been smelly and uncomfortable. Why did they not just throw everything into the waters outside. It certainly would not have disturbed or damaged the world. It was a big ocean outside and everything would be swallowed up and disappeared in time. Why

not just throw everything out and make it much more comfortable for the people and the animals!?"

The boy did not have an answer. I told him all of humanity was on that Ark. All future peoples would come from whoever exited that place. There's a chance that if that became the habit, the widespread custom to throw garbage out the window, then what would the world around look like today?! So, they suffered with the garbage, just so as not to become people who throw junk all about them whenever and wherever they please." That little anecdote made a profound impression and the class neaten up from then on. It was a powerful lesson.

I have a sign in my office that says "How do I know if I'm doing the right thing? Simply ask yourself if everybody would do like I am doing would it be a better class, a better school, a better world? If the answer is yes, keep up the great work, but if the answer is no then stop and make a better choice. I tell kids "You don't have to answer me. You have to answer for yourself." I can see young boys shaking their head no as they reflect on each of these questions.

Years back we went on a picnic with my family and the family of a close friend of mine. Afterwards we asked the kids to pick up some of the trash that blew away from our spot and he sent his children on a wider circuit. I told him that the stuff over there is not from us. He responded that Rabbi Avigdor Miller said, "We should leave a place even better." That is what he was teaching his children. Not only should we not soil or spoil the world around us, or even just keep it as clean, we should rather try wherever we are to make the world a better place.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Smallest Nation, Biggest Family

"The Jewish people may be the tiniest of nations – but we are the largest family." This quote from Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis, mentioned by Rabbi Perez in his eulogy, resonated deeply with those at the graveside of Daniel Perez hy"d last year..

It's an idea that captures the essence of Am Yisrael. We are not simply a nation of 15 million among hundreds of millions – we are a family of 15 million souls, bound by shared memory, faith, and destiny.

Over the past three years, this truth has been felt in extraordinary ways. From South Africa to Moscow, from Washington to Jerusalem – Jews have reached out, helped, prayed, and acted for one another in ways no nation of

strangers ever could. Because when one member of the family is in pain, we all feel it.

In this week's parasha, the Torah lists the families that became the nations of the world. Most peoples began as families and then grew apart. But Am Yisrael has remained what we always were – an extended family, with all the love, loyalty, and even the disagreements that come with it.

May we continue to stand by one another as brothers and sisters – as one big family.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

In reading today's Biblical Portion concerning Noah and the flood, we cannot fail to be stirred by the pathos, and moved by the intensely human drama, of Noah's predicament. Here was Noah, a pious, gentle soul, who had seen much of life and civilization in his day. He knew intimately the people who were his contemporaries whether good or bad, and he was in touch with the major trends of his day, whether he liked them or disliked them. And in his old age, G-d sends him and his family into an ark, windowless and cut off from the world, and keeps him there for forty days and nights. During this time a great flood rages and destroys all life, levels mountains and hills and changes all. Now think of the plight of Noah as he emerges from the ark; listen to his heartbeat as he steps out and beholds the terrible scene. What was once his home is no more. His property and that of his close friends is no longer recognizable. His old friends have died in the ravaging waters. The very landscape has changed the landmarks with which he was so acquainted since childhood are no more. The world he once knew is no more. Here before him is a strange desolation. No doubt there welled up in his soul bitter feelings of melancholy and despair. Sadly he thinks, "Yes, I and mine were saved. But if this is what we were saved for, to be the sole witnesses to complete and utter ruination, I don't think life is worth living. Perhaps it would have been better if I too had perished in the Deluge. Why live, why hope, why work? All is gone, and there is nothing to look forward to."

And at this point, our Rabbis tell us, G-d appears before Noah and does not allow him to continue this moroseness and despair and hopelessness. For G-d showed Noah three worlds. He showed him, first, olam be'yishuvo, the world as it first was, in its "normal" days. He showed what Man could have accomplished: a Paradise, a Tree of Eternal Life, a Tree of Knowledge. He showed Noah the chance man had to attain health and wisdom and happiness. Then he showed him olam charev, the world destroyed – the degeneration of his generation where men practiced deceit and thievery and immorality.

Likutei Divrei Torah

A world which lost itself into a whirlwind of sin and crime and then drowned in a whirlpool of destructive waters – the mabul, the great Deluge, the world in utter ruins. But G-d did not stop there. For had He stopped with the olam charev, Noah would have been justified in his despair. Rather, G-d injects in him new hope and cheer. He also shows him, say our Sages, the third picture: olam be'sikuno, the reconstructed world, the world which can be recreated and rebuilt. "You and your race, Noah," says G-d, "failed miserably in your first chance at making something of Life. You gave up Paradise and Life and Knowledge, you surrendered to chamass, to deceit and looseness, and end in miserable failure, in watery graves. The Flood has destroyed all that Man has done in these many generations. Man fumbled his First Chance. But do not despair, Noah, for just as you have seen a world in operation and that same world destroyed, just as you have seen the failure of the First Chance, so will you see a world rebuilt, so will you be given the opportunity for a great Second Chance." And, indeed, Noah ra'ah olam chadash, Noah beheld a vision of a new world, he began to understand that G-d had really offered mankind a Second Chance. He knew and understood that out of the smoke and dust of desperation and bleakness and tragedy would rise the vision of new worlds and new opportunities. Yes, he foresaw the dangers of drunkenness and avarice and cruelty; but he also foresaw the contributions of Abrahams and Isaacs and Jacobs and Moseses. He grasped the new opportunity to start all over again – the Second Chance. He sensed G-d's goodness, and learned that G-d gives to a world, to nations to communities, to families and to individuals – a Second Chance.

Our generation, writhing in the agonies of pessimism and hopelessness, tossing restlessly under the shadow of atomic destruction, and grappling with despair and frustration and gloom, we too must behold a vision of olam chadash, the New World, the Second Chance, that G-d holds out to us. For we of this generation are as Noah of old. We have seen olam be'yishuvo, the world in its "normalcy," in comparative stability. We remember very well the prosperity which seemed to us a Paradise, the Tree of Life promised by Science and the Tree of Knowledge nourished by great scholars and thinkers. And then we saw too olam charev, we saw the great destruction, World War Two. We saw one third of our people destroyed, we saw nations swallowed alive, families torn apart, forever, old and established customs and traditions thrown overboard, and all that was holy desecrated. We saw Science perverted to experiments on concentration-camp inmates, Knowledge profaned and Paradise plundered. How tempting to despair! How easy to imagine that all is gone, that hope is only a figment of the imagination.

And yet the Bible bids us hope for an *olam chadash*, for a new world, try for the Second Chance G-d gives each and all of us. And so strongly did Judaism insist that Man is offered the Second Chance, that it incorporated it in as one of the thirteen fundamentals of our faith. And that is – *tehiyas ha'meissim*, Resurrection. For indeed the ultimate expression of hope and faith that G-d offers every man and woman another chance to do better, is the belief in resurrection – that all of this life is, in a way, only a first chance; that it is at best imperfect, and at worst a total failure; and that, therefore, G-d offers Man another life, beginning from scratch, a second chance to make something great out of his human existence. For Resurrection is a concept which is broad indeed, and which includes more than physical rejuvenation of dead bodies. It entails, in its broader sense, the promise that you and I will get another chance and opportunity to right what we wronged.

And this Second Chance, what in the metaphor of swimming is known as “second wind,” is a matter of everyday occurrence. A young student fails miserably on an examination. His school gives him a “re-exam.” It is his Second Chance, his Resurrection – if he can succeed and pass it. A man and his wife have made a mess of their married life for a good number of years. Under the guidance of their Rabbi or Minister or Psychologist, they decide to “give it another try.” Here is their Second Chance, an opportunity to resurrect the dying embers of an early love and affectionate companionship. Here is a Jew who has lost his wife and children, parents and brothers and sisters in crematoria and camps. Part of his life is buried in some anonymous mass-grave. He really has nothing to live for. But he settles either in a friendly democracy like ours, or he emigrates to Israel and begins a new life. Multiply that by five hundred thousand and you have the great Resurrection of our age, the terrific Second Chance for Jewry.

Now, of course, you have the right to ask me: granted there is a second chance, but how are we to go about this resurrection in the here-and-now? How is man to successfully revive his life in the second chance? Here we must rely on one of those quaint but profound statements our Rabbis sometimes make. In discussing the question of Resurrection, they tell us the method of revival of the body. They maintain that the Creation of Man, birth, begins or *ubassar* and ends with *giddim va'atzamos*, that G-d first provides the embryo with flesh and skin, and later gives him blood vessels and bones. But when G-d will resurrect mankind, they say, the order will be reversed: first *giddim va'atzamos*, veins and bones and the or *ubassar*, flesh and skin. A curious commentary, indeed, and one wonders why the Rabbis spent time and energy delving into

things so distant and beholden. Of course, they do not mean to outdo our modern scientists who are trying to pump life into dead organs. What they have in mind is not biology but ethics.

Yes, the Rabbis' description of Resurrection tells us much. In your first attempts, they want to say, in your first Chance at Life, the one in which you made your share of human errors and perhaps failed, and which you hope to correct with this “Second Chance Resurrection,” your first interest was or *ubassar*, the skin and flesh that is, the outside, the superficial, the seemingly attractive. You were attracted by color and flash and splendor. It was the exterior of things which attracted and fascinated you. Life was only skin deep. Or *ubassar*. Only too late did you discover that the substance of man is not his exterior. Only too late did you discover that it is a man's blood that counts and even more, his *atzamos*, his backbone, his resistance, his inner self, that which is not overly glamorous, but upon which depends his whole being. Now, in this Second Chance which you are granted, the resurrection can be complete and successful only if you reverse that order. Start, this time, with the *giddim va'atzamos*. Concentrate on the inner matter, think deeper and go to the core of life. Interest yourself in the soul which G-d gave you. *Ki Ha'adam hu ha'nefesh*, blood, represents the soul. Develop your inner faculties of faith and goodness and sincerity and decency, and build yourself *atzamos*, a backbone, the power to resist temptation, the strength to swim upstream, the ability to speak out even for the unpopular. And then, when a man has proven that he has a back-bone and red blood, when he has made himself *giddim va'atzamos*, will he automatically have obtained the or *ubassar*, flesh and skin the glamor and glisten and glow of the external which reflects a substantial inside. Only thus, our Rabbis insist, can Resurrection – the Second Chance – be a success. For G-d resurrects thus too.

Winston Churchill is perhaps the best example of a man who so proceeded when he was given his Second Chance. In his latest biography, by Robert Lewis Taylor we read of young Churchill at the sociable Harrow school which was and is world famous. It was his first chance at proving his real worth. But somehow the or *ubassar* had a supernatural attraction for him. He could not resist the glamour of pushing a fellow student into the swimming pool, the attraction of loudly yawning in an extremely “dignified” church, or the dubious humor of immediately buying two dogs upon learning that it was forbidden to own any at all. He childishly and immaturely strove for a dazzling exterior and cared nothing at all for essentials. He failed more examinations and was refused by more good schools than probably any other great man. He was

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graduated in his class in Harrow, after being “left-back” a number of times. Some years later, his father, Lord Randolph, confided to a friend that he urged Winston to join the army because he considered his son a little retarded and didn't think he would succeed at anything else. It took Churchill a long time to discover that all was not glint and shine, or *ubassar*. When, however, he was accepted at the famous military school of Sandhurst, Churchill changed. No longer were his pranks the major topics of discussion. He withdrew into his own room and self, concentrated on the serious problems of Life and Living, got himself an education even if he didn't like it, and developed his famous character. Now he was resurrecting himself. He began with *giddim va'atzamos*, veins and bones, he became a red-blooded person and studiously built his famous back-bone, a back-bone which was to hold firm in the face of Hitlers and Stalins. Sufficient *elan* and splendor, or *ubassar*, surround this colorful leader today. But only because, when he got his second chance, he followed the right order for Resurrection – *giddim va'atzamos* first.

The same holds true for institutions and nations, of course. The way to a successful Resurrection, a prosperous Second Chance, is clear enough – *giddim va'atzamos*. A state of Israel, despite all her great accomplishments in the first years of her life, may still be considered wanting in the matter of *giddim va'atzamos*. For after the glamor of playing at the game of international diplomacy after the heart warming fact of a Jewish Ambassador in Washington, after the beautiful or *ubassar*, what about the *giddim va'atzamos*? Is that soul sustaining blood circulating freely in Israel, or has perhaps religion been neglected just in Israel? [Can the prime minister, despite his own religious learnings, perhaps show a bit more *atzmos*, back-bone, in dealing with the atheistic left-wing]? One hopes that the next five years will show a Resurrection of religious feeling in Israel, a second chance beginning with *giddim va'atzamos*.

The way to achieve and make the best of the second chance is therefore clear. Let us too, as individuals and as a community and as a people, use that approach to the second chances G-d makes available to us. And may we, constantly imbued and inspired with the vision of the *olam chadash*, of the new and great world which we can attain, be led to the discovery of this *olam be'tikuno*, the world reconstructed; the world where a truce will mean peace, where “prisoner exchange” will mean freedom, and where negotiations will mean not stubborn and aimless debate, but the meeting of free minds resulting in greater visions, deeper understanding, and greater love.



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BS"D

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Adapted from

ספר משכן בצלאל על בראשית by Rav Bezalel Rudinsky

The Righteousness of Noach and the Greatness of Avraham

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו את האלקים התהלך נח - *These are the generations of Noach. Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d* (Bereishis 6:9).

Rashi notes that in his generations can be understood in two opposite ways: מרבתינו דורשים אותו לשבח כל שכן אילו היה בדור צדיקים: היה צדיק יותר ויש דורשים אותו לגנאי לפי דורו היה צדיק ואילו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב לכולם - *Some of our Rabbis interpret it to his praise: if he was righteous even in his own generation, then certainly in a generation of righteous people he would have been still more righteous. Others interpret it to his discredit: relative to his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would have been considered nothing.*

The difference is astonishing. How can the same word move Noach from one extreme to the other? Noach was a *tzaddik tamim*, yet one opinion says that next to Avraham he would have been considered nothing. What, then, was missing in the righteousness of Noach?

Noach Needed Support

Rashi makes another striking distinction. On את האלקים התהלך נח - *Noach walked with G-d*, Rashi says: ובאברהם הוא אומר אשר התהלכתי - *Of Avraham it says, Hashem before Whom I walked. Noach needed support to uphold him, while Avraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness on his own* (Rashi to Bereishis 6:9; see Bereishis 24:40).

This too requires explanation. Avraham faced enormous *nisyonos*. Why did Avraham not need the support that Noach required?

The Midrash gives us another entry into the question. אמר רבי סימון שלש מציאות מצא הקב"ה אברהם דכתיב ומצאת את לבבו נאמן לפניך דוד דכתיב מצאתי דוד עבדי ישראל דכתיב כענבים במדבר מצאתי ישראל איתבון חבירי לרבי - *Rabi Simon said: Hakadosh Baruch Hu found three finds. Avraham, as it says, You found his heart faithful before You; David, as it says, I found David My servant; and Israel, as it says, Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel. His colleagues asked Rabi Simon: Does it not also say, Noach found favor? He answered them: Noach found; Hakadosh Baruch Hu did not find him* (Bereishis Rabbah 29:3).

What does it mean that Hakadosh Baruch Hu found Avraham, David, and Israel, but did not find Noach? Nothing is hidden from Hashem. The Midrash must be describing a particular quality that was present in Avraham, David, and Israel, but was lacking in Noach.

Noach Believed and Did Not Believe

Rashi writes concerning Noach's entry into the *teivah*: אף נח מקטני - *אמנה היה מאמין ואינו מאמין שיבא המבול ולא נכנס לתיבה עד שדחקהו המים* - *Even Noach was among those of deficient faith. He believed and did not believe that the Flood would come, and he did not enter the ark until the waters forced him in* (Rashi to Bereishis 7:7).

This is difficult to understand. Noach stood against an entire generation of wicked people, remained a *tzaddik tamim*, and spent one hundred and twenty years building the *teivah*. If he did not believe the Flood was coming, why did he spend his life preparing for it? In what sense could he both believe and not believe?

The Steipler & Rav Shach: Intellectual Emunah and Felt Emunah

I heard an explanation in the name of the Steipler Gaon zt"l. There are two levels of *emunah*: *emunah sichlis*, intellectual faith, and *emunah chushis*, faith experienced as a living reality. A person can know something to be absolutely true and nevertheless fail to live as though it is standing before his eyes.

Chazal distinguish between what a person knows through hearing and what he knows through seeing: שלא תהא שמיעה גדולה מראיה - *Hearing should not be greater than seeing*. A *beis din* that hears reliable testimony knows what happened, but one who saw the event experiences that knowledge with an immediacy that testimony cannot create. Seeing can make a truth present in a way that abstract knowledge does not.

This was Noach's deficiency. He believed that the Flood would come, but he did not yet feel the Flood as a living reality. Had he felt it that way, he would have entered the *teivah* before the waters forced him inside. A person who truly feels that danger is coming does not

wait for the danger to arrive. Thus *deficient in faith* - *mekhani amna* does not mean that Noach thought Hashem's warning was false. His deficiency was that the truth had not fully moved from intellectual knowledge into felt reality.

I heard a related explanation in the name of Rav Shach zt"l, based on the Gemara in Bava Basra 75a. Rabi Yochanan taught that in the future עתיד הקב"ה להביא אבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם שלשים על שלשים וחוקק *Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring precious stones and pearls thirty by thirty, hollow out openings ten by twenty, and place them in the gates of Yerushalayim.* One student found this impossible to picture. Later, while traveling at sea, he saw ministering angels cutting precisely such stones. He returned and told Rabi Yochanan, דרוש רבי לך נאה לדרוש כאשר אמרת כן ראיתי, *Expound, my Rebbe, for it is fitting for you to expound; just as you said, so I saw.* Rabi Yochanan answered, לא האמנתי, *Empty one, had you not seen it, would you not have believed? You mock the words of the Sages.*

The student was certainly not simply mocking his Rebbe. He was a *talmid* of Rabi Yochanan. Rather, he could not fully understand and picture what Rabi Yochanan had said with complete *emunah*. Only after seeing the stones with his own eyes did his *emunah* become clearer and more complete. The same was true of Noach. He believed that the Flood would come, but when he actually saw it, his *emunah* entered a clearer and higher level.

Avraham's Reward Was Preserved

We can now return to Avraham. After the war of the kings, Hashem told him: אל תירא אברם אנני מגן לך שכרך הרבה מאד, *Do not fear, Avram; I am a shield for you; your reward is very great* (Bereishis 15:1).

The Midrash explains that Avraham was afraid he had already received his reward in this world. He had been saved from the fiery furnace and from the war of the kings. Perhaps all these miracles had diminished what remained for him in *Olam HaBa*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu answered that what Avraham had received in this world had been given freely, while his reward remained preserved for the future. The Targum similarly says אגר עובדיך טביא נטיר ומתוקן קדמי לעלמא דאתי, *The reward of your good deeds is preserved and prepared before Me for the World to Come.*

Why was Avraham different? Why were the benefits he received not deducted from his reward?

Working on Hashem's Account

There are two ways a person can live in *avodas Hashem*. He can live on his own account, or he can live, so to speak, on Hashem's account. An employee who incurs expenses while carrying out the company's work does not pay them from his private account; they belong to the company account. So too, when a person makes Hashem's purpose his own, even his needs become part of the larger mission. He is no longer viewed only as an individual, but as part of the company of *ovdei Hashem*.

A person can learn Torah, perform *mitzvos*, and strive for personal perfection, yet his service may still remain centered on himself. Another person makes Hashem's purpose his own. His concern is not only what he will become, but what will bring *kavod Shamayim* into the world and what he can do for the *klal*. Such a person is not merely accumulating private accomplishments. He has made himself an instrument of Hashem's work.

This was Avraham. His life was not a private search for perfection. He devoted himself to bringing knowledge of Hashem into the world. His successes, his protection, and the assistance he received were therefore connected to the mission itself. This is why his reward could remain preserved. He was working on Hashem's account.

Siyata d'Shmaya and the Tzibbur

The Gemara teaches: יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש להמיתו - *A person's yetzer hara overpowers him every day and seeks to kill him, and were Hakadosh Baruch Hu not to help him, he could not overcome it* (Sukkah 52b).

Every person therefore needs *siyata d'Shmaya* to succeed in *avodas Hashem*. Overcoming the *yetzer hara* requires special Divine assistance beyond what a person can accomplish by his own powers. But one who works for the *tzibbur* also has *zechus hatzibbur*, the merit of those for whom he is working, and can therefore receive a degree of *siyata d'Shmaya* that one whose *avodah* remains entirely individual does not have.

This gives us the key to Noach and Avraham. Noach was a *tzaddik*. Had he lived among righteous people, he might have grown still further in his personal *avodah*. In that sense, the opinion that interprets בדרתיו to his praise is entirely correct. But Avraham possessed another dimension altogether. He was constantly engaged in bringing others closer to Hashem. His *avodah* was the *avodah* of the *klal*. Noach's righteousness remained primarily the righteousness of an individual.

The two interpretations therefore do not have to contradict one another. Both agree that Noach was a genuine *tzaddik*. Each describes a different side of his righteousness. His greatness was extraordinary considering the generation in which he lived, but his *avodah* remained primarily the *avodah* of an individual, and in that respect he could not be compared to Avraham.

The Teivah Was Meant to Reach the Generation

The Torah itself shows that Noach was supposed to move beyond private righteousness. Hashem did not need Noach to spend one hundred and twenty years constructing a *teivah* in order to save him. Rashi explains: הרבה ריוח והצלה לפניו ולמה הטריחו בבנין זה כדי שיראוהו אנשי דור המבול עוסק בה מאה ועשרים שנה ושואלין אותו מה זאת לך והוא אומר - *Hashem had many ways to save him. Why did He burden Noach with this construction? So that the people of the generation of the Flood would see him occupied with it for one hundred and twenty years and ask what he was doing. He would tell them that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was going to bring a Flood upon the world, and perhaps they would repent* (Rashi to Bereishis 6:14).

The *teivah* was therefore not only Noach's means of escaping his generation. It was supposed to be his means of reaching his generation.

This also explains the order of the verses. First Hashem tells Noach ואני הנני מביא את המבול גפר - *Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood* (Bereishis 6:14). Only afterward does He say ואני הנני מביא את המבול - *And as for Me, I am about to bring the Flood, waters upon the earth* (Bereishis 6:17). First came the command to build the *teivah*, so that the generation might see what Noach was doing, ask him about it, and perhaps return in *teshuvah*. Only afterward, if that mission did not succeed, came המבול ואני הנני מביא את המבול - *And as for Me, I am about to bring the Flood.*

Noach did not fully realize this mission. Because his *avodah* remained primarily personal, he did not attain the special *siyata d'Shmaya* available to one who works on behalf of the *klal*. To overcome the *yetzer hara* and reach complete *emunah* requires that *siyata d'Shmaya*. Since Noach did not attain the level of Divine assistance that could have been his, his *emunah* likewise did not reach its highest level. This is why Chazal could describe him as *believing and yet not fully believing*.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Found Avraham

We can now understand the Midrash with which we began. Avraham, David, and Israel were people whom Hakadosh Baruch Hu found. They worked for Hashem and increased *kavod Shamayim* in the world. Noach, however, *Noach found favor*. He was the one who found. He sought how he himself could find Hashem and draw closer to Him, but his *avodah* remained primarily the *avodah* of an individual.

This also explains why Noach needed greater support from Hakadosh Baruch Hu than Avraham. Noach's *avodah* was the *avodah* of the individual; Avraham's was *avodas hatzibbur*, bringing others closer to Hashem and increasing *kavod Shamayim*. He therefore merited the special *siyata d'Shmaya* that comes to one who works on behalf of the *klal*.

Adapted from

אזנים לתורה by Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (1880-1966)

Noach After the Mabul: A Changed World and the Covenant of the Rainbow

Hashem Spoke to the Heart That Had Condemned the World

Hashem said to His heart (Bereishis 8:21). Onkelos understands this as an actual Divine statement, and the context is clearly one of an oath. Why, then, does the Torah say *to His heart*?

Earlier, when all flesh had corrupted its way, the Torah said *אל יתעצב אל* - *He was grieved in His heart* (Bereishis 6:6). From that grief came the decree *I will blot out man whom I created from the face of the earth* (Bereishis 6:7). Now Hashem speaks, as it were, to that very heart from which the decree of the *Mabul* had issued. *I will not again curse the ground because of man; ולא אסף עוד להכות את כל חי כאשר* - *I will not again strike every living thing as I have done* (Bereishis 8:21). The heart that had demanded judgment would no longer demand the destruction of the earth and all its inhabitants.

There is a well-known criticism of Noach. He did not pray for his generation as Avraham later prayed for Sodom. The Zohar therefore connects the waters of the *Mabul* with Noach himself, *מי נח* - *the waters of Noach* (Yeshayahu 54:9). There is also a second question: after living so many years among his generation, why had Noach apparently failed to bring even one person closer to Hashem? These are separate criticisms, but both raise the same difficulty. How did the Noach who entered the *teivah* become the Noach whose *korban* brought a promise of mercy for all future generations?

The answer lies in what happened inside the *teivah*. For an entire year Noach and his sons endured extraordinary hardship, feeding and caring for every living creature day and night. That service purified him. Chazal say *Just as the bird arrangement purifies the metzora, so your teivah purified you*

(Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishis, remez 52). Noach entered the *teivah* as the *tzaddik* of his generation and emerged as a man whose merit would stand for the generations that followed. His *korban* was accepted, and Hashem responded with an oath never again to destroy all life through a *Mabul*.

A World in Which Man Must Work

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease (Bereishis 8:22). This is more than a promise that another *Mabul* will not come. It describes a changed world.

Before the *Mabul*, man lived amid such abundance that the very ease of life became a cause of sin. Chazal describe people planting once and enjoying the produce for forty years, and a climate that remained continuously pleasant, like the season between Pesach and Shavuot. There was little need for labor and little suffering. That abundance contributed to man's arrogance and corruption.

After the *Mabul*, Hashem established a different order. There would be *seedtime and harvest*, *cold and heat*, *summer and winter*. Man would have to work. The changing seasons would bring effort, discomfort, and at times suffering. This too was part of Divine mercy. Labor occupies a person and restrains sin; suffering can cleanse sin. The promise never again to destroy the world was therefore accompanied by a new way of preventing the conditions that had led to the *Mabul* in the first place.

You Do Your Part, and I Will Do Mine

And I, behold, I establish My covenant with you (Bereishis 9:9). The expression *ואני* suggests reciprocity: you do what is placed upon you, and I will do what is Mine. Mankind must rebuild the world and live within the new order established after the *Mabul*. Hashem, for His part, promises that He will never again destroy the world through a *Mabul*.

This reciprocal idea becomes essential to understanding the rainbow. If the promise is entirely Hashem's, why is it called a *bris* at all?

Why Is the Rainbow Described Three Times?

I have placed My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth (Bereishis 9:13). A few verses later the Torah says *the rainbow will appear in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant that is between Me and you and every living creature* (Bereishis 9:14-15). Then it says a third time *and I will see it to remember the eternal covenant between Elokim and every living creature of all flesh upon the earth* (Bereishis 9:16).

Why does the Torah describe the rainbow three times, and why does the wording change?

A *bris* is normally an agreement between two sides and therefore imposes obligations upon both. If only one party undertakes an obligation toward the other, the proper form is an oath. Thus Avimelech asked Avraham *Now swear to me by Elokim that you will not deal falsely with me, with my son, or with my grandson* (Bereishis 21:23). For a unilateral promise, an oath was sufficient. Only when there were mutual obligations did Avraham and Avimelech make a *bris*.

The rainbow, however, seems at first to involve only a Divine promise never again to destroy the world. Why then is it called a *bris* rather than a *shevuah*? Indeed, Yeshayahu describes it explicitly as an oath: *as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again pass over the earth* (Yeshayahu 54:9).

The Rainbow Is Also a Call to Teshuvah

The meaning becomes clearer from another verse. Yechezkel describes his vision of the Divine glory: *Like the appearance of the rainbow in the cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the radiance around it; this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem* (Yechezkel 1:28). Chazal likewise say that when Rabbi Yehoshua expounded the secrets of the *Merkavah*, a rainbow appeared in the sky in the season of Tammuz, as though the Shechinah had come to hear his teaching (Chagigah 14b). The rainbow is therefore not merely a natural phenomenon. It can signify an appearance of *kavod Hashem*.

When a rainbow appears, it tells the generation that Divine judgment could have been aroused. When complete *tzaddikim* protect a generation, the rainbow is unnecessary. This is why Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked whether a rainbow had appeared during a sage's lifetime, using its absence as a measure of the protection afforded by the righteous (Kesubos 77b).

The rainbow is therefore not meant merely to be admired. It is meant to awaken the heart. Staring at it is forbidden because of its association with the Divine glory (Chagigah 16a), but seeing it should lead a person to understand that the generation requires *teshuvah*.

This is the human side of the *bris*. Hashem promises that the waters will not again become a *Mabul* that destroys all flesh. Man, in turn, must see the sign, understand its warning, and return to Hashem. If man does so, the cloud and rain that could have become a source of destruction become instead a source of blessing. The promise can therefore properly be called a *bris*, because there is an obligation on both sides.

The *Mabul* affected three parts of creation: the earth itself, the animal world, and mankind. Concerning the earth, the Torah says *I am about to destroy them with the earth* (Bereishis 6:13). Chazal understand that the earth itself was included in the destruction. The animals too perished because of man, although they possess no human moral choice. Man alone was guilty, and man alone can be commanded to repent.

The three formulations of the rainbow correspond to these different relationships. First comes *between Me and the earth* (Bereishis 9:13). The earth cannot accept a moral obligation. Hashem therefore undertakes that *I will not again curse the ground because of man* (Bereishis 8:21). Although the Torah calls this a *bris*, toward the earth it functions as a Divine oath.

Next comes *between Me and you and every living creature* (Bereishis 9:15). Here mankind is included, and therefore there can be a true reciprocal covenant. The rainbow appears; people see it; they recognize the state of the generation and do *teshuvah*. Hashem then remembers the covenant, and the rain becomes blessing rather than destruction.

But what if the rainbow appears and mankind does not understand its message and does not return? Would the promise then fail?

The third formulation answers this fear: *the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will see it to remember an eternal covenant between Elokim and every living creature of all flesh upon the earth* (Bereishis 9:16). Here the Torah no longer says *between Me and you*. It speaks more broadly of every living creature. Even if man fails to fulfill his side, Hashem will remember the eternal promise to creation.

The animals themselves provide a claim of mercy. They did not choose man's sin, yet they suffer when man corrupts the world. Chazal relate that when Alexander of Macedon was confronted with the claim that the sun and vegetation exist only for man, he was shown that animals too depend upon them. So too here, if mankind were destroyed, the innocent animal world would perish with it. Hashem can therefore show mercy to man for the sake of the other creatures of the world.

Thus the rainbow contains both a *bris* and, behind it, an unconditional *shevuah*. Man is not meant to rely upon that oath. He is meant to see the rainbow, understand its warning, and do *teshuvah*. But even if man fails, Hashem has bound Himself never again to destroy all life through a *Mabul*.

Adapted from

by Rav Asher Weiss

The Seven Mitzvos of Bnei Noach: Divine Command and Human Reason

The Rambam writes a remarkable halachah concerning the seven mitzvos of Bnei Noach. A non-Jew who accepts and observes these mitzvos is among the *Chasidei Umos HaOlam* and has a share in the World to Come, but only if *he accepts and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah*. If, however, *he performs them because his own reason has led him to them*, he is not thereby included among the *Chasidei Umos HaOlam* (Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 8:10-11).

This requires explanation. The Taryag mitzvos given to Yisrael and the seven mitzvos given to Bnei Noach are not of the same character. The mitzvos of Yisrael were given so that a person should do the will of his Creator and cleave to Him; they are the essence of *avodas Hashem*. The seven mitzvos, by contrast, are described by the Rishonim and Acharonim as *laws necessary for civilized life*, whose purpose is *the proper ordering of political and social society*. Without law, justice, respect for life and property, human society cannot endure. If so, these are precisely the mitzvos that human reason should recognize on its own. Why, then, does the Rambam insist that reason is not enough? Why must they be kept specifically because Hashem commanded them? This question opens a broader issue: are Bnei Noach obligated only in the seven mitzvos that were expressly commanded, or are they also bound by moral obligations that human reason itself recognizes? The Netziv, in his approbation to the Chafetz Chaim's *Ahavas Chesed*, writes a great chiddush: Bnei Noach are obligated in all *mitzvos sichliyos* - rational moral obligations - including *tzedakah*

and chesed. In this way he explains why the people of Sedom were punished for rejecting chesed even though tzedakah is not one of the seven mitzvot.

We find an important foundation for this in the Rishonim. The Ramban asks why the decree against the generation of the Flood was sealed specifically because of theft. He answers that robbery is *סיבה* - *a matter understood by reason* for which they needed no prophet to warn them, and it is evil both toward Heaven and toward other people (Ramban, Bereishis 6:13). Rabbeinu Bachya writes similarly concerning Sedom that *הצדקה מן המצוות המושכלות* - *tzedakah is among the rational mitzvot*. It is an abomination for a wealthy and satisfied person to see another human being starving and have no mercy upon him (Rabbeinu Bachya, Bereishis 18:20).

Yet these Rishonim do not necessarily establish a general halachic rule that every rational moral obligation becomes a formal mitzvah for Bnei Noach. They may be teaching something narrower: even where there is no specific command, Hashem may punish a society that has descended into extreme cruelty and wickedness. There is a difference between saying that conduct is morally intolerable before Hashem and saying that it is included in a defined halachic obligation.

The Netziv, however, has a strong source in the Chizkuni. The Chizkuni asks how the generation of the Flood could have been punished if they had not been commanded in the relevant mitzvot, and answers: *יש כמה מצוות שהייבים בני אדם לשומרן מכה סברת הדעת אעפ"י* - *there are certain mitzvot that human beings are obligated to observe by force of reason even though they were not expressly commanded*. He gives Kayin's punishment for murder as an example (Chizkuni, Bereishis 7:21). Still, the Chizkuni's language is careful. He says *יש כמה מצוות* - *there are certain mitzvot*. He does not state a sweeping rule that everything which appears morally correct to the human mind automatically becomes a Divine command.

Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon goes further. In his introduction to Shas he writes that all mankind was commanded in those mitzvot that human intellect itself demands, matters that flow from *אובנתא דליבא* - *the understanding of the heart*. According to this approach, the Creator placed within man a moral consciousness by which he can recognize fundamental obligations even without an express command.

But this itself requires thought. I have written elsewhere that, were it not for the words of Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon, I would have said that *אין אדם מחוייב אלא במה שנצטווה מפי עליון ולא במה שימצא מדעתו ומרצונו* - *a person is obligated only in that which he was commanded from Above, not in that which he creates from his own understanding and will*. Human reason is precious, but can human reason by itself create a command of Hashem? We may understand that an act is wise, humane, or necessary for society. That is not yet the same as knowing that this is what Hashem commands.

I was therefore very pleased to find this idea stated explicitly by the Sefer HaIkkarim. R' Yosef Albo explains that Adam HaRishon was commanded at the beginning of creation because *שבולת ציווי אלוהי אי אפשר שידעו הדברים הנרצים* - *without Divine command it is impossible to know with certainty which things are desired by Hashem*. Kayin, the generation of the Flood, the people of Sedom, and Pharaoh were punished because they violated that which had been commanded by

Hashem, not merely because they failed to arrive at the correct moral conclusion on their own (Sefer HaIkkarim 3:7).

It would seem that there are two separate questions which must not be confused. One question is whether the human mind can recognize good and evil. Certainly it can, and before Matan Torah the Creator Himself implanted that recognition within man. The second question is what transforms moral insight into *Ratzon Hashem* and a binding religious obligation. These are not necessarily the same thing. A person may reach the correct conclusion through reason and still relate to it merely as his own judgment. The Rambam teaches that the highest level is reached when man recognizes that the moral order itself comes from Hashem.

There may therefore be room to suggest a middle path. Just as every Jew is obligated not only in the particular Taryag mitzvot but also in a more general obligation to do *Ratzon Hashem* as that will is revealed through the Torah, so too Bnei Noach may have, beyond their seven formal mitzvot, a general obligation to fulfill the will of Hashem in the realm of the rational mitzvot. Before Matan Torah, *יצר בראשית העיר והאיר את לב האדם מטבעו לדעת טוב ורע ולבחור בחיים* - *the Creator awakened and illuminated the human heart by its nature to know good from evil and to choose life*. After Matan Torah, however, we do not create the will of Hashem from our own moral feeling. *Ratzon Hashem* is known as it is revealed and reflected in Torah.

Even this must be stated with care. Were it not for the words of Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon, it would be more compelling to say that just as we have only the words of this Torah, so too Bnei Noach have only their seven mitzvot and that which can properly be learned from them. The authority of human moral intuition cannot simply be unlimited. Otherwise each generation could turn its own changing moral judgments into the command of Hashem. The entire point is that morality is not detached from the Creator who is its source.

A striking application of this distinction appears in the mitzvah of honoring parents. The Gemara states explicitly that Bnei Noach were not commanded in *kibbud av va'em* (Kiddushin 31a; Sanhedrin 56b). Yet the Rambam rules that a convert may not strike or disgrace his non-Jewish father, so that people should not say *באנו מקדושה חמורה* - *we have come from a more stringent holiness to a lesser one* (Hilchos Mamrim 5:11). How can there have been a more stringent state before conversion if the non-Jew was never commanded in honoring his father? According to what we have explained, the matter is understandable. A Ben Noach may not be commanded in *kibbud av va'em* as a full, defined mitzvah, and nevertheless *אמם ואמם* - *as an expression of the will of Hashem, honoring father and mother rests upon them*. There can be a moral demand of *Ratzon Hashem* even where there is no separate mitzvah counted among the seven.

We can now return to the Rambam with which we began. The fact that the seven mitzvot are rational does not make Divine command unnecessary. It makes the question deeper. Hashem created a world in which man can recognize that murder, theft, immorality, injustice, and cruelty destroy human society. But the Rambam teaches that a righteous person does not stop with the statement, "This makes sense to me." He understands that the moral order of the world is itself the will of its Creator. Reason can lead man toward the truth; the Torah teaches him Whose truth it is. The seven mitzvot are therefore both the foundation of civilized society and commandments of Hashem.

Their social purpose and their Divine source are not alternatives. They are two dimensions of the same obligation.

What Was Wrong with Migdal Bavel?

Collection of sources by **Chaim Ozer Shulman**

Based on the Midrash, Gemara, Rashi, Rashbam, Abarbanel, Akeidas Yitzchak, and Nechama Leibowitz

The Torah's account of **Migdal Bavel** leaves us with an unusual problem. By the generation of the Mabul, the Torah tells us explicitly what had gone wrong: *the earth was filled with violence*. By Migdal Bavel, however, the Torah describes what mankind was doing and how Hashem responded without ever clearly telling us what was wrong with the project. **ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת** - *The whole earth was of one language and common words*. They settled in Shinar and said **הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם פן נפוז על פני כל הארץ** - *Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top reaches the heavens, let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth*. Hashem then says **הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות** - *They are one people and have one language, and this is only what they have begun to do; now nothing they plan will be beyond them* (Bereishis 11:1-6). What exactly did Hashem see that required Him to intervene?

Chazal themselves recognize the difficulty. **Bereishis Rabbah** says *the deeds of the generation of the Mabul were explained, but the deeds of the generation of the Dispersion were not explained*. The Torah seems deliberately to leave us with clues rather than one explicit explanation. **Rashi** begins with the mysterious words **וידברים אחדים**. Following Chazal, he gives several possibilities. According to the first, באו בעצה אחת ואמרו לא כל הימנו שיבור לו את העליונים נעלה לרקיע, *they came together with one plan and said: He cannot choose the upper realms for Himself; let us ascend to heaven and wage war against Him*. Another explanation understands their words as directed **על יחידו של עולם** - *against the Unique One of the world*. A third explanation is quite different. They claimed that **אחת** - *once every 1,656 years the heavens collapse*, and therefore proposed *let us make supports for it* (so the Mabul, in their view, could be treated as a recurring natural catastrophe which human ingenuity could prevent). **Bereishis Rabbah** expands on the first approach of Rashi. They would place an idol at the top of the tower with a sword in its hand *so that it would appear as though it were waging war against Hashem*. The **Gemara Sanhedrin 109a** likewise speaks of different groups with different purposes: *אחת* - *one said, let us ascend and live there; one said, let us ascend and worship avodah zarah; and one said, let us ascend and wage war*. Chazal themselves therefore do not reduce the project to one motive.

Rashbam takes a very different approach and begins with the question itself: *according to the peshat, what was wrong with the Dor Haflagah?* Was the problem really *its top in the heavens?* Rashbam points out that elsewhere the Torah describes *great* - *great fortified cities reaching the heavens*. A very tall building is not itself

the problem. Rashbam therefore focuses on *lest we be scattered*. Hashem had commanded mankind *be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth*. Instead, *they chose a place to remain there and said, lest we be scattered*. The response therefore follows directly: because they refused to spread voluntarily, Hashem scattered them. The **Netziv** in *Haamek Davar* begins at almost the same point as Rashbam but develops it in a surprising direction. On *שפה אחת* he explains that their common language enabled them *to agree that everyone would remain together in one concentrated settlement*. This was contrary to Hashem's intention that mankind spread throughout the world. The Netziv then turns to *וידברים אחדים*. The Torah never tells us exactly what those common ideas were, and he explains *Hashem's concern was not the particular ideas, whatever they may have been, but that they were completely uniform*. Yet the Netziv immediately acknowledges the obvious difficulty: *on the surface there is no wrongdoing in this at all*. Why should it be wrong for a society to be united around common ideas? The problem was what this particular kind of unity could eventually require in order to preserve itself. Why, then, were they so frightened by *פן נפוז*? What difference would it make if some people left and established another settlement? The Netziv answers *because the opinions of human beings are not identical*. Once people were free to separate, some would eventually develop different views. The tower therefore had a practical purpose. It had to be high enough *to observe from it at a distance* and ensure that the surrounding settlements did not break away. *meant, in the Netziv's reading, officials and supervisors charged with enforcing the system*, together with officers empowered to punish anyone who violated it. The Netziv summarizes the danger sharply: *their common ideas became a source of destruction, because they resolved to kill anyone who would not think as they did*. Rashbam sees the refusal to disperse; the Netziv asks what can happen when a society becomes determined that no one be permitted to disperse. What begins as geographical concentration can become a demand for intellectual uniformity. The Netziv sees a hint of where this could lead in an apparently minor detail earlier in the story. The Torah tells us *let us burn the bricks thoroughly*. Why does the Torah care how their building material was manufactured? The Netziv connects the great kiln built for the city and tower with the tradition that Avraham Avinu was later cast into a fiery furnace. The furnace had originally been built *for the needs of the city and tower*. Eventually it could become the instrument used against the man who refused to share the beliefs of the society. This connection is especially striking because immediately before the story of the tower the Torah has already introduced Nimrod: *the beginning of his kingdom was Bavel* (Bereishis 10:10). Chazal associate Nimrod with the rebellion of Bavel, and later Bereishis Rabbah describes Avraham being brought before Nimrod after challenging the idolatry of his society. Nimrod's final answer is not another argument but the furnace. The contrast is striking: the society that sought *וידברים אחדים* followed by Avraham, the man whom

Chazal describe as *כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד והוא* because *the entire world stood on one side and he stood on the other*.

There is, however, another way of looking at the story. **Abarbanel** focuses on the development of human civilization itself. Nimrod represents the emergence of centralized political power, cities and hierarchy. Abarbanel is deeply suspicious of what happens when political organization, honor, possessions and human achievement become the purpose of life rather than means to a higher purpose. Nechama Leibowitz develops this approach while also bringing other mefarshim who do not regard monarchy or organized society itself as objectionable. The Akeidas Yitzchak gives the point a more balanced formulation. Human society is necessary, and cooperation, government, wisdom and human creativity can all be used properly. The problem begins when the means becomes the end, when organized civilization itself becomes man's ultimate purpose instead of serving his moral and spiritual purpose.

The Torah's description of the bricks can now be understood in another way as well. There was no stone available in Shinar, so mankind found another solution: *הבה נלכנה לבנים* - *let us make bricks*. This was an impressive human achievement. There is nothing wrong with making bricks or developing the physical world. But Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer describes what happened when the project itself became supreme: *ואם נפל אדם ומת לא היו שמים לבם אליו ואם נפלה לבנה* - *if a person fell and died, they paid no attention to him; but if a brick fell, they sat and cried*. The building that was supposed to serve human beings had become more important than the human beings who were building it. Now *ונעשה לנו שם* - *let us make ourselves a name* acquires a deeper significance. Human intelligence, technology and organization had ceased to be merely tools. The great human enterprise was becoming a monument to man himself. We are therefore left with several different explanations. **Chazal and Rashi** emphasize rebellion against Hashem and confidence in human power. **Rashbam** sees a refusal to fulfill Hashem's plan that mankind spread throughout the earth. The **Netziv** sees what a determination to remain completely unified could become. **Abarbanel and the Akeidas Yitzchak** focus on a civilization that had begun to make its own organization and achievements into an end. These explanations need not be forced into one theory. Chazal themselves speak of different groups with different motives. But neither must they exclude one another.

There is also an important distinction between what mankind had already done and what Hashem saw beginning to develop. The Torah says *וזה החלם לעשות* - *this is only what they have begun to do*. The language looks forward. Abarbanel describes Hashem as *ירד לסוף* - *seeing the ultimate outcome of their undertaking and perceiving the end from its beginning*. The **Netziv** makes the same point in his own way: *עתה אינו אלא התחלת דבר עבירה* - *at present this is only the beginning*. If the tower were completed, he writes, *יבואו למחשבה שניה למנוע בעל כרחו היוצא ממחשבתם זו* - *they would come to a second idea, to prevent by force anyone who departed from their way of thinking*. What at first appeared simply as social unity could ultimately produce *רצח ושוד המשחית את הישוב לגמרי* - *murder and violence that would destroy society itself*. Hashem saw not only what Babel was, but what it could become.

And yet **Rashi** leaves us with one final complication. If the project of

Babel contained such dangerous ideas, why were its builders not destroyed like the generation of the Mabul? Rashi answers that the people of the Mabul were robbers and lived in conflict, while the Dor Haflagah *היו נוהגין אהבה וריעות ביניהם* - *conducted themselves with love and friendship*. He concludes *למדך ששנאוי המחלוקת וגדול השלום* - *this teaches how hateful division is and how great is peace* (Rashi, Bereishis 11:9). Their unity was therefore not itself the problem. To the contrary, their unity was sufficiently precious that it protected them from destruction. Nor was technology the problem, nor cities, nor political organization, nor even a shared ideal. The question was *what those powers were being used to serve*.

Nechama Leibowitz in *עיונים חדשים* shows a parallel to a pasuk in Tzefaniah, where he describes a future world in which mankind will once again share a common language: *כי אז אהפך אל עמים שפה ברורה* - *Then I will transform the peoples to a pure language, so that they will all call in the name of Hashem and serve Him together* (Tzefaniah 3:9). Babel also began with *שפה אחת* - *one language*. The Torah's answer to Babel is therefore not permanent division. At Babel mankind said *ונעשה לנו שם* - *let us make a name for ourselves*. The future ideal is *לקרוא כלם בשם ה'* - *for all mankind to call in the name of Hashem*. The Torah does not reject the dream of a united mankind. It asks whether that unity is used to make a name for man, or to call together in the name of Hashem.

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date: Oct 15, 2026, 10:53 PM

Rav Frand - Parshas Noach

Finding the Rainbow in Every Person

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on Parshas Noach: #1485 I Just Saw a Rainbow – Should I Tell My Neighbor?

The pasuk says, *ויאמר אלקים זאת אות הברית אשר אני נתן ביני וביניכם לדורת*, *עולם*. (9:12) The Ribono Shel Olam says about the rainbow, I am placing between Me and you the sign of the covenant for all generations.

There is an interesting Medrash Rabba in Parshas Noach, parsha 35 os 7 that points out that the word ledoros (for generations) is written chosser (lacking). Normally, it is written with letter vavs: dalet-vav-reish-vav-sof. Here it is written chosser – without letter vavs: dalet-reish-sof. The Medrash quotes Rabi Yuden, who said, “The word ledoros is written without the vavs to exclude two generations.” Two vavs are missing, representing two missing generations. The Medrash says that the rainbow did not appear during two generations. The Gemara asks, “Which were those two generations? The dor (generation) of Chizkiyahu and the dor of the Anshei Knesses Hagedola.” There were no rainbows during the dor of Chizkiyahu Melech Yehuda (the king of Yehuda) because Chizkiyahu Melech Yehuda was a tzaddik yesod olam. Tzaddik yesod olam is an expression that means a tzaddik upon whom the world rests. That was the level of Chizkiyahu Melech Yehuda. The Ribono Shel Olam wanted to make Chizkiyahu into Mashiach. There was never a rainbow in his dor because the tzidkus (righteousness) of Chizkiyahu overwhelmed any accusation against the people.

The other dor in which there were not any rainbows is the dor of the Anshei Knesses Hagedola. The Anshei Knesses Hagedola, as we

know, consisted of 120 gedolei hador (greatest of the generation), including nevi'im (prophets), who established the nusach hatefila (text of the prayers). Their zechus (merit) was so overwhelming that never in their dor did the Ribono Shel Olam bring a rainbow because He never contemplated destroying the world. Rabi Chizkia says no, the second generation in which there was never a rainbow is the dor of the Tanna Elokai, Rabi Shimon bar Yochai. Again, he was such a tzaddik yesod olam that there was never a rainbow in his generation. The Medrash says that Eliyahu Hanavi was learning b'chavrusa (in a twosome) with Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi. Suddenly, they came across a statement from Rabi Shimon bar Yochai. Eliyahu said, the ba'al ha'memra (the author of this teaching) himself said it. Let us go and ask him. In other words, Rabi Shimon bar Yochai is around, he's the author of this teaching. Let's go ask him what he meant. Let's ask him to explain it.

Eliyahu Hanavi went into Rabi Shimon bar Yochai. Rabi Shimon bar Yochai asked him, "Who is with you?" Eliyahu answered, "The gadol hador (greatest of the generation) is with me, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi." Rabi Shimon bar Yochai asked him, "Did a rainbow ever appear in the days of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi?" Eliyahu answered that yes, there were rainbows. Rabi Shimon bar Yochai said, "If a rainbow appeared in his days, he is not worthy that I should see his face." Since there was a rainbow in Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's days, I don't want to see him, because he's not a tzaddik yesod olam – a tzaddik gomur (complete). A rainbow will not appear during the days of a tzaddik gomur. Therefore, Rabi Shimon bar Yochai didn't want to see him. A similar Gemara in Maseches Kesubos basically says the same idea regarding rainbows during the time of Levi bar Levi. However, this concept seems to contradict the pasuk "Noach ish tzaddik tomim hayah b'dorosov" (Noach was a perfect tzaddik in his generation). If Noach was a perfect tzaddik, why did a rainbow appear during his days?

Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik [1903–1993] says that it must be that this Medrash about a rainbow not appearing during a dor that has a tzaddik yesod olam must be going like that famous Rashi in the beginning of Parshas Noach that says that had Noach lived in the generation of Avraham Avinu, he would not have been considered significant.

Why, in fact, was there a rainbow during the days of Noach? Why was Noach not a tzaddik yesod olam? The reason is because Noach did not protect his dor, so he was not a tzaddik yesod olam, in whose time a rainbow would not appear.

In fact, the Zohar says that the Ribono shel Olam had a tayna (criticism) on Noach. Why didn't you daven (pray)? You were building the teiva for so many years, why didn't you daven? Why weren't you mashpia (influence) on your dor? The Zohar concludes that it was because Noach held that his dor was so incorrigible and beyond redemption that there was no point in davening. There was no point in trying to be mashpia.

In fact, Rav Meir Shapiro adds that if you don't believe in the basic goodness of someone, you'll never be mashpia on him letova (for good). If you're convinced that a person is beyond redemption then nothing is going to help. That, in fact, is what happened with Noach. He was not successful because he held in his heart of hearts that the people were incorrigible.

Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik says that this is the symbolism of the

rainbow. When the Ribono shel Olam brings a rainbow during the dor of Noach, what is He teaching Noach? Hashem is teaching Noach that when everything appears dark, and a person appears to be so far away, so rotten and dark, in the midst of that darkness, light can appear. That is a rainbow. A rainbow occurs after it suddenly turns black outside. Lights that are on light sensors will even turn on in the middle of the day because it's so dark. Then it rains. Then the clouds dissipate and the sun comes out, and then you see the rainbow. The message is that no matter how dark it may be, there can always be light. It may be hidden, and it may not be very visible, but there's always light. The tayna on Noach is that he failed to appreciate the potential of his dor.

That is why the mabul (flood) is referred to in Sefer Yeshayah as Mei Noach (the waters of Noach). Why Mei Noach? Because there's a tayna on Noach. The tayna on Noach is that he did not do enough for his dor.

I want to perhaps suggest that this Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is lishitso (consistent with his point of view elsewhere) that you should never give up on someone, no matter how beyond hope the person appears to be. We see this in the famous Gemara in Maseches Brachos on daf 27b-28a, regarding a machlokes (argument) between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua. They decided to remove Rabban Gamliel from the position of the nasi. The Gemara says that they appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya instead. This is the famous Gemara about Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya becoming the nasi when he was only eighteen years old and his beard turning white overnight. We're familiar with the story from the Haggadah.

The Gemara says that the day that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya became the nasi, there was a change in policy about who they accepted into the yeshiva. Rabban Gamliel would publicly proclaim, "Any talmid (student) who is not tocho k'baro (his inner character is not like his outward appearance) may not enter the beis hamedrash." Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya had a different shita (point of view). He said no, we don't need to have such high quality standards. The Gemara says that after they removed the guard from the beis hamedrash, hundreds of benches were added because hundreds of additional talmidim now came into the yeshiva. The Gemara says that Rabban Gamliel became depressed. "Perhaps, chas v'shalom, I withheld Torah from Klal Yisrael."

"There had been a hundred bochrim in the yeshiva. Now there are seven hundred bochrim in the yeshiva. Am I going to be held accountable for withholding Torah from all these talmidim?" He had a dream that night, in which, he saw white pitchers full of ashes, as if to say, "You are right, those talmidim were really not worthy." But that was not really so. He was merely shown this in order to put his mind at ease. The truth of the matter is that Rabban Gamliel was wrong.

The Chiddushei Harim, the first Gerer Rebbe [1799 to 1866] asked, why did Rabban Gamliel feel bad? This is his shita. He held that the talmidim need to be tocho k'baro. He saw those seven hundred applications. He did not suddenly have this epiphany, "Oh look, I could have had so many more talmidim." He saw those applications. That was his shita. He may have been wrong, but at least he should not suddenly say, "Oh look what I could have had."

The Chiddushei Harim explains that once the talmidim came into the beis hamedrash, they became different people. Rabban Gamliel was

right, they were not *tocho k'baro*. But Rabban Gamliel himself did not realize the amazing power of what Torah can do to a person. That is what happened, and that's why Rabban Gamliel was depressed. Rabban Gamliel was appeased by the white pitchers with ashes inside, but the truth of the matter is, he was wrong because he did not appreciate the effect of the Torah on the talmidim who were not yet *tocho k'baro*.

Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik explains that when ashes look all burnt out, there can always still be a spark in there. If you blow on the spark, you might actually relight the fire. That was the true meaning of the *mashal* (parable) of the white pitchers full of ashes. Ashes may look like they're all burnt out, but there can still be a spark in there. Noach and Rabban Gamliel failed to recognize that potential.

Editor Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, Maryland; dhoffman@torah.org; Editor Emeritus David Twersky; Jerusalem; This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. View a full listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Noach. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadychiel.org or visit <http://www.yadychiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2026 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350 [9] My thanks to Rabbi Moshe Kahn (Melbourne) for his assistance in developing this insight.

Adapted and summarized from

עיונים בפרקי הפטרות by Rav Moshe Lichtenstein

בין רני עקרה לעניה סערה

Two Kinds of Consolation: Roni Akarah and Aniyah So'arah

The *haftara* of *Parashas Noach* is unusual. It combines two prophecies of Yeshayahu that at first seem very similar. The first begins *לדה לא ילדה* - *Sing, barren one who has not given birth* (Yeshayahu 54:1). The second begins *עניה סערה לא נחמה* - *Afflicted one, storm-tossed and unconsolated* (Yeshayahu 54:11). Both speak to a suffering people and both promise redemption. Yet they are really describing two different kinds of suffering, and therefore two different kinds of consolation.

This distinction is reflected in the way these prophecies are read. In the cycle of the seven *haftaros* of consolation after Tisha B'Av, they appear as separate readings. The Sefardi custom similarly preserves the independence of *רני עקרה* and does not join *עניה סערה* to it for *Parashas Noach*. The Ashkenazi custom, however, combines them. If we understand the difference between the two prophecies, we can also understand why they can nevertheless form one *haftara*, and why both belong to *Parashas Noach*.

Two Different Forms of Suffering

The difference begins with the two images themselves. The *akarah*, the barren woman, suffers because she sees no future. The *aniyah so'arah*, the afflicted woman tossed by a storm, suffers because of what is happening to her now.

The pain of childlessness is certainly a pain of the present, but its deepest anguish lies in the future. A person looks ahead and does not see children, descendants, or continuity. That is why Rachel cries *הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אני* - *Give me children, and if not, I am dead* (Bereishis 30:1). Avraham, despite all that Hashem had already promised him, asks *מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך ערירי* - *What can You give me when I go childless* (Bereishis 15:2). The present may contain blessing, but without a future those blessings cannot satisfy him.

So too with *Klal Yisrael* in *galus*. There were periods when Jewish life in exile was not marked by immediate physical persecution. Jews could earn a livelihood and even live with a measure of security. Yet there remained a deeper fear: Where is all of this leading? Can a nation remain in exile forever? Will there still be a Jewish people generations from now? The tragedy of the *akarah* is therefore not primarily what hurts today. It is the fear that there is no tomorrow.

The *aniyah so'arah* suffers in precisely the opposite way. Her future may eventually improve, but that does not lessen the storm in which she presently finds herself. She is poor, humiliated, frightened and battered by circumstances. The problem is not that she cannot imagine tomorrow. It is that today itself is unbearable.

The two prophecies therefore address two different experiences of *galus*. One is the despair of a people that sees no future. The other is the suffering of a people crushed by the present.

Two Different Consolations

Once the problem is different, the consolation must also be different.

To the barren woman Yeshayahu does not primarily say that her present suffering will become easier. He tells her that she has a future. *הרחיבי מקום אהלך ויריעות משכנותיך יטו אל תחשכי הארכי מיתריך ויתדתיך* - *Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch out the curtains of your dwelling, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes* (Yeshayahu 54:2).

The image is striking. She is being told to prepare now for the children who will fill the tent later. The future has become so certain that it already changes the present. Once a person knows that the barrenness will end, the despair begins to lift even before the child is born.

This is the consolation of *רני עקרה*. It does not simply promise a pleasant future. It restores meaning to the present by restoring confidence in the future.

עניה סערה requires a different response. Here the problem is the suffering itself, and therefore the consolation addresses immediate relief. *שמעו שמוע אלי ואכלו טוב ותתענגו בדשן נפשכם* - *Listen to Me and eat what is good, and let your soul delight in abundance* (Yeshayahu 55:2). The language is not prepare the tent for tomorrow, but eat, live and find goodness now.

One prophecy therefore says: there is a future, and knowing that can sustain you through the present. The other says: the suffering of the present will itself come to an end.

This distinction explains why Yeshayahu needs both prophecies. *Galus* threatens a Jew in two ways. It can make the present unbearable, and it can make the future seem impossible. *Nechama* must respond to both.

Israel as Servant and Israel as Beloved

There is a second, deeper distinction between the two prophecies. It concerns the relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*.

Tanach presents that relationship in two different forms. In one, Hashem is Master and Israel is His servant. *ואתה ישראל עבדי יעקב אשר* - *You, Israel, are My servant, Yaakov whom I have chosen* (Yeshayahu 41:8). Similarly, *זכר אלה יעקב וישראל כי עבדי אתה יצרתך עבד לי* - *Remember these things, Yaakov and Israel, for you are My servant; I formed you as My servant* (Yeshayahu 44:21).

The servant is defined by responsibility. He has commands to fulfill and a mission to perform. His greatness lies precisely in accepting

the yoke of his Master and carrying out the task for which he was chosen.

But there is another relationship in Tanach, not of master and servant but of husband and wife. *I will rejoice greatly in Hashem, my soul will rejoice in my G-d, for He has clothed me in garments of salvation* (Yeshayahu 61:10). The prophecy continues with the imagery of bride and groom, culminating in *As a bridegroom rejoices over a bride, so will your G-d rejoice over you* (Yeshayahu 62:5).

This relationship is not based primarily on what the beloved can accomplish. A servant is chosen to perform a task. A spouse is loved for who he or she is. The connection itself creates the commitment. That is the language of עקרה. Israel is the wife who has been temporarily abandoned but never rejected. רגע קטן עזבתיך וברחמים גדלים. *For a small moment I abandoned you, but with great mercy I will gather you* (Yeshayahu 54:7). בשצף קצף הסתרתי פני רגע ממך ובחסד. *In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you* (Yeshayahu 54:8).

The separation is real, but the relationship has never been broken. The anger is the anger of a relationship that still exists. *Geulah* therefore means reunion.

רני עקרה places greater emphasis on Israel as the servant of Hashem. Its language culminates in *This is the inheritance of the servants of Hashem, and their righteousness is from Me* (Yeshayahu 54:17). Here redemption comes to a people who serve Hashem, fulfill His will and receive the inheritance promised to His servants.

The first prophecy therefore rests upon intimacy. The second rests upon mission. Israel is both beloved and servant, and *geulah* must reflect both relationships.

Is Redemption Earned or Given?

This leads to another important difference.

In *עניה סערה*, redemption is connected to Israel's conduct. בצדקה תכונני. *You will be established through righteousness; distance yourself from oppression and you will not fear* (Yeshayahu 54:14). The next chapter similarly calls upon the people to listen, come to Hashem and live. There is a demand placed upon man. The servant receives his inheritance because he has served.

In *רני עקרה*, however, the emphasis is very different. No condition is stated. The abandoned wife is taken back because she is his wife. The covenantal bond itself is the reason for redemption.

This does not mean that *mitzvos* and *teshuvah* are unimportant. It means that there is a level of the relationship between Hashem and Israel deeper than merit. There are responsibilities created by the relationship, but the relationship is not created by the responsibilities. That is why this prophecy can make the astonishing promise *The mountains may depart and the hills may be removed, but My kindness will not depart from you and My covenant of peace will not be removed* (Yeshayahu 54:10).

Mountains themselves are less permanent than the bond between Hashem and His people.

Why Roni Akarah Belongs to Parashas Noach

We can now return to the obvious connection between the *parsha* and the *haftara*. Yeshayahu explicitly invokes the Flood:

- כי מי נח זאת לי אשר נשבעתי מעבר מי נח עוד על הארץ כן נשבעתי מקצף עליך ומגער בך *For this is like the waters of Noach to Me; just as I swore that the waters of Noach would never again pass over the earth, so have I sworn not to be angry with you or rebuke you* (Yeshayahu 54:9). But the connection is deeper than a shared reference to the Flood. What did the covenant after the Flood mean? It meant that the continued existence of the world would no longer depend entirely upon man's deserving it. Before the Flood, mankind corrupted the world and the world was destroyed. After the Flood, Hashem established a covenant that such total destruction would never occur again.

That covenant does not rest upon a promise that mankind will never again sin. Human freedom remains, and human beings may again fail. The covenant instead expresses Hashem's decision that He desires the continued existence of the world even when the world is unworthy.

This is precisely the idea expressed by *רני עקרה*. Israel's redemption rests ultimately not only upon achievement but upon Hashem's enduring relationship with His people.

This understanding of Noach appears in the tefillos of Rosh Hashanah:

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת ותפקדו בדבר ישועה ורחמים בהביאך את מי המבול לשחת כל בשר *You remembered Noach with love and recalled him with salvation and mercy when You brought the waters of the Flood to destroy all flesh because of the evil of their deeds*

Noach is remembered in the context of *ישועה ורחמים* - *salvation and mercy*. The survival of Noach becomes the beginning of a world that exists not only through *din*, but through *rachamim*.

The Midrash sharpens the point by reading *וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'* - *Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem* (Bereishis 6:8), as emphasizing *chein*, favor, rather than a strict claim of entitlement. The world continues because Hashem wishes the world to continue.

So too, Yeshayahu invokes *ברית מי נח* - *the covenant of the waters of Noach* as the model for Israel's redemption. Just as Hashem bound Himself to the continued existence of mankind, He binds Himself to Israel. The covenant rests upon a relationship deeper than the calculation of merit at any particular moment.

Two Prophecies, One Haftara

We can now understand why *רני עקרה* is the central prophecy for *Parashas Noach*. The connection is not merely the phrase *מי נח*. Both the *parsha* and the prophecy teach that there is a covenant founded upon Hashem's desire to preserve and redeem even when redemption cannot be explained simply as a reward for merit.

Yet the Ashkenazi custom adds *עניה סערה* because the picture would otherwise be incomplete. A Jew is not only the beloved who can rely upon an eternal relationship. He is also the servant charged with responsibility. *Geulah* is both a gift born of covenant and the fulfillment of a mission. It answers both the despair of the future and the pain of the present.

עניה סערה teaches that there is a bond that cannot disappear. *רני עקרה* teaches that this bond does not remove responsibility. Israel remains both beloved and servant.

That is why the two prophecies can stand together. The first tells us why redemption is ultimately certain. The second tells us what kind of people we must be as we await it.

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date: Oct 15, 2026, 9:58 PM

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

Why Do the Sages Feel Compelled to Denigrate Noah?

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 vicissitudes 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]

Footnotes: [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 Noah 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 נאמר בדורותיו, א"כ קשה על רבי יוחנן למה משכו נפשו לדורשו לגנאי" (באר שבע סנהדרין דף קח, א) "All my life I was grinding (my teeth). Since the term "in his generation," can be explained positively or negatively, why did Reb Yochanan's soul compel him to explain it disgracefully?" [5] Genesis 7:1 [6] The Rebbe shared this during a public address ("farbrengen") on Shabbos Parshas Noah 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 Noah). 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

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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

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

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

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

WHAT IS A TOLADA?

The word toladot stems from the Hebrew word 'vlad', a child or offspring. Therefore, 'eileh toldot' should be translated 'these are the children of...'.
 For example: 'eileh toldot **Adam**' (5:1) means - 'these are the **children** of Adam' - and thus introduces the story of Adam's children, i.e. Shet, Enosh, Keinan, etc. Similarly, 'eileh toldot Noach' introduces the story of Noach's **children** - Shem, Cham, and Yefet. [See Rashbam on Breishit 37:2 for a more complete explanation.]

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

This explanation raises a question concerning the first instance where we find toldot - i.e. **toldot shamayim va-aretz** (see 2:4). How do the heavens and earth have 'children'?!
 [Note how various English translations attempt to solve this problem when they translate this pasuk!]

The answer to this question may be quite meaningful. Recall that the first chapter of Breishit explains how God created **shamayim va-aretz** (heavens and earth) from 'nothing' (ex nihilo). Then, immediately afterward in the next chapter, we encounter the first use of toldot:
 "Eileh **toldot ha-shamayim** ve-ha'**aretz** be-hibar'am..." (2:4).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TWO SECTIONS OF SEFER BREISHIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
=====	=====	=====
1-4	'shamayim va-aretz'	Man in (and out of) Gan Eden
5-9	from Adam to Noah	'dor ha-mabul' - the Flood
10-11	benei Noah 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 tolados.

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 tolados. 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 (shores 'chillul'), i.e. they didn't call in His Name properly - see also Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:1]

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 tolados, 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 Noah (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 tolados - this time the development of the seventy nations from the children of Shem, Cham, and Yefet - and again, just like the two units that preceded it, this unit also concludes with a story where the word "**shem**" emerges as thematically significant, i.e. the story of Migdal Bavel. As we will now explain, in this story, once again mankind is not looking for God; rather they are interested solely in making a 'name [**shem**]' for themselves!

MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM IS CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And when the prophet Tzefania describes ultimate redemption, we find once again an allusion to Migdal Bavel:

'ki az ehpoche el amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. (see 3:9)

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

(Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4).

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

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

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

C. See Tzefania 3:8-9 and its context, especially 'ki az 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 Canaan' (in the story of when he is cursed by his father/ see 9:22-25).]

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

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

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

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

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

'SETTING THE STAGE'

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

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

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

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

SHIUR #2

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

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

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

Nonetheless, the classic commentators (as well as several Midrashim) interpret this pasuk in the opposite direction, understanding that the word "HUCHAL" implies the **defilement** of God's Name (shoresh "chilul" -see 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 worshipers!]

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

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

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

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

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

BEFORE THE FLOOD

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

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

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

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

AFTER THE FLOOD

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

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

BEFORE MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

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

AT MIGDAL BAVEL

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

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

BACK TO ENOSH

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

"LIKRO B'SHEM HASHEM"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then, the Torah enters minute detail of all of the children of 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

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 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 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 *hbxk 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.