

Weekly Parsha NOACH
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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

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

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

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

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

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

Burdened by this greatness the Jewish people have fallen short of the mark numerous times in our history. But we have always risen again to attempt to fulfill our destiny and realize our potential. It is this characteristic of resilience, inherited from our father Abraham, that has been the key to our survival. We have constantly dealt with great ideas and issues. Drunkenness, whether physical or spiritual, has

never been a trait of Jewish society. We are aware of the story and fate of Noach, but we pursue the greatness of Abraham as our goal in life.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Midrash then adds:

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

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

This was, of course, part of an ancient tradition, mentioned by Rashi in his commentary (to Gen. 6:9), and central to the Sages' understanding of why God began the Jewish people not with Noah but with Abraham. Noah, says the Torah, "walked with God" (6:9). But God said to Abraham,

“Walk on ahead of Me” (Gen. 17:1). So the point was not new, but the drama and power of the Midrash were stunning.

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

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

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

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

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

In many cases – such is the fate of innovators – the people concerned had to face a barrage of criticism, disdain, opposition, or disregard. You have to be prepared to be lonely, at best misunderstood, at worst vilified and defamed. As Einstein said, “If my theory of relativity is

proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare me a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German, and Germany will declare that I am a Jew.” To be a pioneer – as Jews know from our history – you have to be prepared to spend a long time in the wilderness.

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

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

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

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

Parshas Noach

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

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

Clothes Call

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

Rashi (9:22) explains the circumstances of these events: Noach’s son Cham (upon seeing his father naked and passed out drunk) emasculated his father and joyfully reported his actions to his brothers. Rashi (9:25) further explains that Cham was driven by the desire to eliminate competition for their inheritance: As long as there were three brothers, the world would be divided only among

them, but if Noach were to have additional children, they would have to share it with more heirs. In Cham's view, he had done the family a service by mutilating his father.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peace or Piece?

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

languages and scatter them across the face of the earth. This becomes known as "the dispersion."

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

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

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

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

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

These two aspects are the keys to giving a nation its own definition; a particular type of geography develops a certain defined skill set, and different languages to express the individual uniqueness of those nationalities. Once each nation is satisfied and comfortable with its identity, it becomes possible to appreciate other nations and nationalities. Thus, the nations can begin to see how they

need each other. When there is a level of personal satisfaction among the people of a nation, the other nations are no longer viewed as a threat; in fact, they are recognized as necessary allies in order to achieve goals for the greater good. This is the very definition of shalom; completing each other to create a greater whole. This is true in our world, in our community, and in our homes.

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

Teivah	vs	RMS Titanic
1) Time to Build 120 years		3 years
2) Construction Crew 4		15,000
3) Length 600 feet		882 feet
4) Width 100 feet		92 feet
5) Height 60 feet		104 feet
6) Draught 22 feet		34 feet
7) Decks 3		9
8) Weight 35,741 tons		46,328 tons
9) Length of Service 378 days		5 days

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Noach: What is our most repetitive blessing?

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What is our most repetitive blessing?

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

The wording is as follows:

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

zocher habit – who remembers the Covenant

vene'emen bevrito – and Who is faithful to His Covenant

vekayam bema'amaro – and who fulfils His word.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Noach :: Language Barrier

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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

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

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

"Windshield," retorted the American.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of Reb Shimon Sumner by the Oliner Family

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand -

Parshas Noach

The Connection Between Noach and Metzorah

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, Noach was not merely in the Teiva to escape from and survive the Flood. It was also a penance. He needed to pay a price. He needed to be there locked up with all these

animals for twelve months. So we see clearly from this Medrash that Noach needed purification.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sometimes Only Hashem Realizes...

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

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky explained that sometimes when society begins to decline, the society does not realize how

far they have drifted. We need the Ribono shel Olam to say, "My gosh! Look at what has happened."

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

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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

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

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

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

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

This midrash is surprising. What motivation would there be to use a derogatory phrase to describe Noah after the Torah had just praised him as righteous? It seems that the answer to this lies in the personality to which Noah is compared – Abraham. Abraham was chosen to be the patriarch of the Jewish nation. Why wasn't Noah – the righteous and perfect – chosen for this purpose?

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

What did God answer Noah when he left the Ark and saw the world destroyed? He [Noah] began to cry before God and he said, "Master of the universe, You are called compassionate. You should have been compassionate for Your creation." God responded and said, "You are a

foolish shepherd. Now you say this?! Why did you not say this at the time I told you that I saw that you were righteous among your generation, or afterward when I said that I will bring a flood upon the people, or afterward when I said to build an ark? I constantly delayed and I said, 'When is he [Noah] going to ask for compassion for the world?' ... And now that the world is destroyed, you open your mouth, to cry in front of me, and to ask for supplication?" (Zohar, Noah)

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

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

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

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

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

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Rav Kook Torah

Noah: The Rainbow in the Clouds

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

After the Flood, God informed Noah:

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

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

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

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

Pre-Flood Morality

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

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

Greater Moral Guidance

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

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

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

We can now understand God's promise never again to flood the world. After the Flood, total destruction of mankind became unnecessary, as the very nature of human ethical conduct was altered. Our inner spiritual life became more tightly connected to our external physical actions. As a result, the need for such a vast destruction of life, as occurred in the Flood, would not be repeated. Of course,

individuals — and even nations — may still choose to sink to the level of savages and barbarians. But the degree of immorality will never again reach the scope of Noah's generation, where only a single family deserved to be saved.

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

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Parashas Ki Seitzei

פרשת נח תשפ"ג

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Veritably, both explanations are dependent upon one another. One cannot achieve his personal perfection; he cannot become an *adam* until he perfects his fellow. Noach worked on himself. Avraham reached out to others. This was his approach to perfecting himself. As long as the rest of the world did not acknowledge Hashem's sovereignty, Avraham viewed himself as less-than-perfect. A Jew does not live for himself. We are here to serve. What greater service can we perform than reaching out to others?

אתה קח לך מכל מאכל אשר יאכל ואספת אליו

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

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

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

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

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that while the water had subsided, the survivors merit to leave and re-inhabit the world had not yet been fully achieved. Noach was saved because he had spent one whole year 24/7 taking care of the various creatures on board his Ark. The emotional stress and physical toil that were part and parcel of this mission are indescribable. One time he came late with the lion's dinner and he paid dearly, when the angry

lion hit him with great force. Why? The lion does nothing on his own. He is nothing more than Hashem's agent. Apparently, Hashem wanted Noach to feel pain. Why? What did Noach, the consummate *baal chesed*, do that should incur such punishment?

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

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

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

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

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

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

woman handed the cashier her credit card to scan and disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

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

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

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

ויאמר אלקים אל נח זאת אות הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין כל בשר על הארץ

And Hashem said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have confirmed between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.” (9:17)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The story is well-known. The reaction is not. During the days of darkness, when the Nazi murderers

were systematically decimating European Jewry, ten martyrs, *yeshivah* students, whose only offense was being Jewish, were randomly selected to be hung. This public display of cruelty was by design, in order to disgrace and demoralize the hapless Jews in the ghetto. To add to the pain, the murderers chose the holy day of *Shavuos*, the day of *Kabbolas haTorah*, as the execution date.

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

The next morning Shlomo led the group in *Tefillas Shacharis*, *Mussaf* and, as the day waned, they prepared for *Tefillas Neilah*, the closing prayer of the Day of Atonement. By now, all members of the ghetto had been rounded up, so that they could watch the public execution. Terror gripped everyone – everyone, but the ten martyrs, who were ensconced in an otherworldly holiness and purity. The murderers could take their bodies, but not their souls. The Nazis were shocked to see the ten would-be victims come forward, heads held high, as if unafraid of their fate.

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

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

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

believed. For the first time in weeks, he put on *Tefillin* and *davened* fervently to Hashem. He had returned.

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

Va'ani Tefillah

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

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

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

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

Mr. Zev Aryeh Solomon

ר' זאב ארי' ב"ר יעקב שמואל ז"ל - נפטר ח' חשוון תשע"ד - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

[Noach

The Hero for the Simple People

Thank Goodness, Noach Was No Saint

Rabbi YY Jacobson

October 31, 2019 | 2 Cheshvan 5780

Henry Kissinger's Suit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Debate on Noah's Persona

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who was Noah? is the question. Was he really a man of extraordinary stature or just a cut above the rest? Did G-d

save him because he was a "perfect tzaddik," or there was nobody better?

Why Denigrate a Hero?

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

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

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

There are various interpretations. One of my favorite ones was presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in 1964.[6] Not only were the Rabbis not trying to minimize Noah's virtues; they actually wanted to highlight his praises even more. Equally important, they were trying to teach us all a transformative lesson.

Who Can Change the World?

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

An achievement indeed, if there was ever one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uniform Biographies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Sanhedrin 108a

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

Perhaps we can suggest that these two sages' dispute is connected to their own life story. Rabbi Yochanan was raised in piety and holiness; Reish Lakish was a gangster and gladiator who later became one of the greatest Torah sages of his age (Talmud Bava Metizah 84b). Reish Lakish, remembering his past, and knowing the dark side of human nature and its great potency, teaches that if 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 קה, א

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

[5] Genesis 7:1

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

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

[7] Genesis 9:20

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

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

May I Daven in English?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

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

Question #1:

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

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

Question #2:

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

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

Question #3:

Bracha Acharona asked me the following:

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

Those That Can and Those That Cannot

The Mishnah (Sotah 32a) supplies a rather long list of mitzvos that are fulfilled only when recited in Hebrew and those that are fulfilled when recited in any language. For example, one cannot fulfill the requirements of chalitzah (see Devarim 25:7-10), duchening (see Bamidbar 6:24-26),

and the narration that accompanies bikkurim (see Devarim 26:5-11), unless one recites the exact Hebrew words that the Torah cites. On the other hand, other mitzvos, including the reciting of shema, prayer (including shemoneh esrei), and birkas hamazon (bensching) can be fulfilled by translating the relevant passages into a language which that [K1] one understands. Indeed, the Gemara (Brachos 40b) records an instance in which an individual named Binyomin the Shepherd bensch in Aramaic, and Rav ruled that he had fulfilled his requirement. The Gemara explains the reason for why some mitzvos may be fulfilled in translation, but not others, on the basis of several intricate interpretations from various verses.

Which is preferable?

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

Tosafos' opinion

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

Hebrew for the Hungarians

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

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

What does veshinantam mean?

The Mishnah Berurah adds an additional reason to recite shema in Hebrew; there are several words in shema that are difficult to translate, or whose meaning is unclear. For example, the word veshinantam may often be translated as and you shall teach them, but this translation does not express the full meaning of the word. The word for teach them in Hebrew is velimad'tem, which is used in the second parsha of shema. The word veshinantam means teaching students until they know the Torah thoroughly, and simply translating this word as and you shall teach them does not explain the word adequately.

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

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

Other hard translations

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

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

could Binyomin the Shepherd have fulfilled his bracha by reciting the translation of the word rachum?

Rav Moshe answers that although the source of the word Rachmana and the word rachum are the same, Rachmana is the translation of G-d's Name in Aramaic, and therefore it is used in Aramaic prayers and blessings. However, rachum is not a translation of G-d, but an attribute of G-d, and its recital in a bracha is not adequate.

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

Is "G-d" correct?

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

The position of the Sefer Chassidim

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

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

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

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

The Yad Efrayim's approach

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is this the language of the country?

At this point, I would like to address Bella's predicament: Hungarian is the only language that I read and understand. Someone told me that, now that I am living in the United States, I cannot pray in Hungarian, but must learn to read either English or Hebrew. Is this so?

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

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

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

Rav Gustman's position

Other authorities dispute the Bi'ur Halacha's conclusion, demonstrating that this concern of the Ritva refers only to a

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

Must one understand the foreign language?

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

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

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

Do we follow Tosafos' opinion?

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

I suggest the following explanation of Tosafos' view: The drasha of Chazal states that one fulfills shema only in a language that one understands. This is logical, because shema is accepting the yoke of Heaven, and how can one do this without comprehending the words? The same idea applies to the shemoneh esrei -- how can one pray if he does not understand what he is saying? Birkas hamazon is also a very high level of thanks, and what type of acknowledgement is it, if one does not know the meaning of the words he is saying? However, one can praise in a language that he does not understand, as evidenced by the fact that chazzanim or choirs may sing beautiful praise, although they do not necessarily comprehend every word. Similarly, as long as one knows that kiddush sanctifies

Shabbos, he fulfills the mitzvah, even if he does not understand the words.

Conclusion

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

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha
For the week ending 23 September 2017 / 3 Tishri 5778
Of Elul, L'David, and Golems
Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

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

A Fishy Tale?

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

What is a (Kosher) Fish?

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

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

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

creatures. Since the *Stincus Marinus* has legs instead of fins, it could not be considered a true fish, and must therefore not be kosher.

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

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

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

Rule of Thumb (or Fin)

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

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

Scientifically Speaking

A scientific study published in 1840 by Rabbi Avraham Zutra of Muenster identified the *Stincus Marinus* as a relative of the scorpion, or a type of poisonous toad. [16] Similarly, the *Chasam Sofer* [17] wrote that he accepted the findings of "expert scientists" who confirmed that the

Stincus Marinus is not actually a sea creature at all. Rather, it lives on the shore and occasionally jumps into the water, as does the frog. According to both of these Gedolim, our “fish” was most definitely not a fish, rather a sheretz (non-kosher crawling land animal)! This would make the entire preceding halachic discussion irrelevant, as the Stincus Marinus would not fall under the category of Chazal’s statement, and would thereby be 100% non-kosher. The Kozeglover Gaon[18] actually uses this “fish” as a testament to the Divinity of the Torah, as the only known exception to Chazal’s rule turned out to be not a fish at all, but rather a type of lizard!

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

Practical Impracticality

The Gemara questions Chazal’s rule that scales suffice to render a fish kosher, “Why then does the Torah mention fins altogether? The Gemara answers in an extremely rare fashion: “l’hagdil Torah ulha’adirah”, ‘to magnify and enhance the Torah[20]. The Magen Avraham in his peirush on the Yalkut Shimoni[21] takes this a step further. He writes that l’hagdil Torah ulha’adirah was not limited to the topic of fins and scales. Rather, it was also referring to our Stincus Marinus. Similar to Rashi’s explanation to the famous last Mishna in Makkos[22], that Hashem wishes to grant Klal Yisrael extra reward and He therefore added effortless Torah and Mitzvos, such as refraining from eating repulsive creatures that one wouldn’t want to eat anyway. So too, by our “fish”, since it is poisonous, one wouldn’t have any sort of desire to eat it, thus possibly taking it out of the realm of practical halacha. Nevertheless, this whole issue of finding out its kashrus status was meant for us to delve into exclusively to get rewarded in the Next World, an infinitely more appealing approach.

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

Postscript:

Scientifically, it appears that the classification Stincus Marinus is a misnomer, as it is categorized as a lizard from

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[21] Zayis Raanan (Parshas Shemini, commentary on the Yalkut Shimoni; explanation on pg 146a). The Lev Aryeh (Chullin 66b, end s.v. b'gm') explains that it seems from the Magen Avraham's elucidation

that he seems to agree with the opinion of Rav Yonason Eibeschutz that Chazal's fish rule was not meant to be absolute. For, if it was, why would the Gemara conclude that extra reward is given for staying away from a poisonous Stincus Marinus that would technically have been kosher? L'hagdil Torah ulha'adirah would only have been applicable if this "fish" turned out to be the exception to the rule, and even though it had scales was still not kosher. Accordingly, although we would avoid this "fish" because it was poisonous, we would nonetheless still attain sechar for doing so, as it would not have been deemed kosher.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This article was written L'iluy Nishmas R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, and l'Zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

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