

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**  
**AFTER THE HOLIDAYS**

The concluding week of Tishrei always carries with it a note of anti-climax, if not even sadness. The great holidays of the year have departed with their soaring beauty and meaningful moments of personal reflection. Flooded with memories of the past we were transported to a different existence, physically and emotionally.

Time was slower, family dearer and our spiritual bond with our innermost souls stronger than the rest of the year. The Psalmist wrote of "tying the holiday (sacrifice) to the altar" and not allowing it to simply escape from our conscience and evaporate in the tumult of everyday life. The task of life is to hold on to precious moments of memory and inspiration.

The problems, challenges and troubles of life are omnipresent and constant. That is the unchangeable matrix of human life. Without soaring memories and recollections of the good that we have experienced in our lives we would all be doomed to sadness and depression. The holidays of the year arrive to reinforce that good that lies within our being and point us in the direction of further positive accomplishments, no matter what stage in life we find ourselves in.

Holding on to the spirit of the holidays allows us the strength to successfully survive long winters of mundane existence. This concluding week of Tishrei is meant to ease us back gently into our usual lives and experiences, allowing us to carry the spirit and memories that were engendered during the holidays of awe and joy.

The advent of the colder and wetter weather that now begins also carries with it the appearance of the various types of viruses that we lump together under the category of influenza. From 1918 till 1921 twenty million (!) people died from the disease. In World War I, more American soldiers died from influenza than did from German bullets. In an age of less sophisticated medical knowledge and technology than ours, the disease ravaged much of the world's population.

Today's world knows of preventive measures such as the "flu shot" to help prevent the onset of the disease and to soften its symptoms if it should nevertheless occur. Since the virus is somehow aware of the powers of inoculation, it in turn routinely mutates and many times has been able to thwart the preventive effects of the vaunted "flu shot." So it is somewhat of a guessing game between the medical researchers and the virus itself as to what strain of the virus will actually be prevalent in the season after the holidays.

I have always regarded the ability of viruses to mutate in order to escape their destruction as one of the great wonders of nature. How can the virus know what type and strain of inoculation is being planned and formulated? Yet somehow it seemingly does and this serious game of cat and mouse continues every year. People should certainly avail themselves of the preventive therapy of the "flu shot" and pray that we get it right this year.

The month of Mar Cheshvan that immediately follows the holidays is the one month of the year that is devoid of any special days of commemoration and ritual. We have to make do with the memories of the great days of Tishrei and the anticipation of joy that Chanuka will bring to us next month. Mar Cheshvan is the immediate test of the idea expressed above of retaining the quality of the holiday within us even when the holiday has already passed.

Judaism stresses to us that even though we must live in the present, without the past and the future being included, the present oftentimes seems empty of meaning and significance. It is Tishrei and Kislev that grant Mar Cheshvan importance and stature. It is not an empty month

for it carries with it the fresh memory of the holidays and is the harbinger of the feast of Chanuka that will come after it.

This ability to live in many different time zones at one and the same time has been the key to Jewish survival throughout the ages. We always still lived in the Land of Israel even though at the moment we were exiled from being there. We always celebrated the Temple service even though there was no longer a physical Temple where we could worship. We have always mastered the lesson of Mar Cheshvan.

A healthy winter to all.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

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

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 Mister 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 generations, 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 is no one size fits all in ethical and moral behavior standards. The rabbis of Midrash taught us that the greater the human capacity for holiness brings with it a commensurate capacity for dissolute behavior as well.

The Talmud stated that it was the scholarly righteous who had the strongest evil inclination within them. The responsibility for spiritual greatness is commensurate with the capacity for holy greatness of each individual person. This is why Noach found 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 Noah and therefore we pursue the greatness of Abraham as our goal in life.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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*Read articles about Shabbos Rosh Chodesh should note that there are several articles on the subject on RabbiKaganoff.com, entitled A Special Shabbos Meal on Rosh Chodesh. I found them by using the search words Shabbos Rosh Chodesh*

**Ata Yatzarta – An Unusual Beracha  
What If I Goofed and Said Tikanta Shabbos by Mistake?  
Bensching in the Dark on Rosh Chodesh  
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*Among the rishonim in this week's parsha, we find a dispute as to when the rainbow was created. The pesukim imply that the rainbow was created after the mabul as a covenant, and, indeed, the Ibn Ezra explains the verse this way, disputing an earlier interpretation of the posuk from Rav Saadyah Gaon. However, the Ramban contends that the rainbow was created during the six days of Creation. This provides us with an opportunity to discuss a great rishon, about whom most people know very little - Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra*

**Question #1: The Right Bensch**

“What is the correct text of our bensching?”

**Question #2: Contract Law**

“I signed a five-year employment contract, and, three years later, I have an offer that is much better for me. Am I halachically required to turn down the new offer?”

**Question #3: Pidyon Haben**

“When should I schedule the pidyon haben of my son?”

**Question #4: Light Refraction**

“When did water begin to refract light?”

**Question #5: What is going on?**

“What do the previous questions have to do with one another and with the title of this article?”

**Introduction:**

Rav Avraham Ibn Ezra, one of the early rishonim, is known primarily as a commentator on Tanach, for his massive knowledge of Hebrew grammar (dikduk), philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, and for his skills as a paytan, a poet. Since this is a halachah column, the second part of this article will discuss his little-appreciated contribution to halachic knowledge. But, first, I will share some details of his very tragic personal life.

According to the estimate of historians, ibn Ezra was born in Moslem Toledo, Spain, about the year 4853 (1093), or perhaps a bit earlier, and passed away about 4927 (1167). In his younger years, in Spain, he was a close friend of Rav Yehudah Halevi, the author of the Kuzari and many piyutim and kinos, including the poem Yom Layabasha, traditionally sung at brissin and as part of davening on the seventh day of Pesach.

In addition to ibn Ezra's famous work on Tanach, he also authored many works on Hebrew grammar, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. One of his works, Sefas Yeser, is a defense of Rav Saadyah Gaon's approach to dikduk that was challenged by Dunash ibn Labrat. Dunash, who is quoted by Rashi dozens of times, was a grammarian, Hebraist and Tanach expert who lived in the tenth century, and was himself a talmid of Rav Saadyah. Notwithstanding this, he often disagreed with his rebbe, and he even wrote a sefer delineating his points of dispute. Ibn Ezra wrote a response to this work, in which he explained why he felt Rav Saadyah was correct. By the way, Dunash is also known for his poetry. We are all familiar with two of his compositions, Dror Yikra, the Shabbos zemer, and Devei Haseir, recited at weddings and sheva brachos.

Ibn Ezra was highly respected, both by his contemporaries and by other great Torah leaders. For example, in a lengthy letter written to the Rashba by a talmid chacham from Provence, ibn Ezra is described

as “a tremendously wise, well-known scholar, whose understanding of the truth, intensity in his pursuit of wisdom, and distancing errors in faith in the Torah and the writings of the Prophets surpassed all those who preceded him. Our forefathers told us of the rejoicing of the great scholars of our area when he passed through our area. For their benefit, he wrote commentaries on the Torah and the Prophets, and wherever he noticed something that required clarification, he pointed this out, sometimes with a full commentary and sometimes with just a short hint, depending on the need. He also wrote a short book called Yesod Hamora, explaining the reasons for the mitzvos and briefly alluding to deeper nuances of words. He wrote another book, explaining the secret of the Holy Name.... He also wrote works on Hebrew grammar, punctuation and the proper writing of the letters, and short works on engineering, language structure, mathematics and astronomy” (see Shu't HaRashba 1:418).

Ibn Ezra wrote much poetry, including two of our standard Shabbos zemiros, Tzomoh Nafshi and Ki Eshmera Shabbos.

His primary fame for most talmidei chachamim is his commentary to Tanach. The Ramban writes, in the introduction to his own commentary on the Torah, that he used two commentaries, those of Rashi and of ibn Ezra, and he does not comment on a posuk that they already explained unless he has something to add.

**Ibn Ezra and Chumash**

In his poetic introduction to his commentary on Chumash, ibn Ezra mentions numerous commentaries on Chumash, most of which would otherwise be completely unknown to us, and notes their widely varying styles. There, he categorizes them into five styles of commentary, and he criticizes four of them, either for not being relevant to understanding the chumash, or for errors in their comprehension of Hebrew grammar. He saves his most scathing attacks for the Karaite commentaries, several of which he mentions by name, and strongly refutes their scholarship.

Ibn Ezra often quotes from Rav Saadyah Gaon's commentary to Chumash, always translating Rav Saadyah's Arabic commentary into Hebrew. In ibn Ezra's commentary to Tanach, he utilizes his vast understanding of dikduk, and also his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and geography.

Ibn Ezra held that studying Chumash or Tanach requires one to understand the exact meaning of the verses, even when the result of this study conflicts with the midrashic interpretation of Chazal and even if it does not agree with halachah. This is how he understood the axiom, ein mikra yotzei midei peshuto, every verse should be explained on the basis of its literal meaning. In this approach, he differed with Rashi and the Ramban, both of whom reject any interpretation of a posuk that conflicts with halachah. Although the rishonim accepted ibn Ezra's right to differ with them in this policy, not all Gedolei Yisroel were happy with his approach. For example, the Maharshal, who lived hundreds of years later, writes very strongly against those who explain pesukim not according to halachah, singling out ibn Ezra for his criticism (Introduction to Yam shel Shelomoh commentary to Chullin).

It is interesting to note that we find this dispute among rishonim reflected among the later commentaries on Chumash written in the nineteenth century. Whereas the Kesav Vehakaballah, Hirsch and the Malbim all follow the approach of Rashi and the Ramban that every interpretation of Torah shebiksav must fit perfectly with Chazal's understanding of the Torah shebe'al peh, the Netziv, in his commentary Ha'ameik Davar, occasionally accepts or offers a commentary that is not necessarily reflected by the Torah shebe'al peh, thus following the general approach of ibn Ezra regarding this issue.

**Ibn Ezra and the Nochosh**

In some instances, we are indebted to the ibn Ezra for providing us with background to the writings of early Gedolei Yisroel that would otherwise have become completely lost. For example, in his commentary to Bereishis (3:1), he reports that Rav Saadyah Gaon held that the nochosh walked on two feet and was an intelligent animal, smarter than all the other animals except for man, but smart enough to

have a conversation with man. Ibn Ezra then quotes a debate on this topic in which Rav Shmuel ben Chofni, son-in-law of Rav Hai Gaon, disagreed with Rav Saadyah, and in which Rav Shelomoh ibn Gabirol came to the defense of Rav Saadyah's position. This entire debate was saved for posterity due to its inclusion in Ibn Ezra's commentary.

#### Ibn Ezra on Tanach

We have access to Ibn Ezra's commentary on all of Tanach, except for the books of Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel. It remains historically unresolved whether he never wrote on these books or whether he did write commentaries but they were lost.

Although he was obviously quite fluent in Arabic, he wrote his works in Hebrew, although until his time most works on Hebrew grammar or philosophy had been written in Arabic. He thereby became one of the earliest sources of bridging the Torah that was spread in Spain and North Africa, which at the time were Arabic speaking areas, to the Ashkenazic communities of France and Germany and to the communities of the Provence. (The Jews of the many communities of the Provence, in southern France, such as Montpellier, Lunel, Marseille, Narbonne and Posquieres, were technically neither Ashkenazim nor Sefardim. The customs prevalent there represented their own unique minhagim. For example, the communities of the Provence began reciting V'sein Tal Umatar on the seventh of Marcheshvan, which we know as minhag Eretz Yisroel, but which reflects neither Ashkenazic nor Sefardic normative practice.)

Ibn Ezra had very strong opinions about the role of piyutim and selichos in our liturgy. In his commentary to Koheles (5:1), he takes very strong umbrage at the piyutim of Rav Elazar Hakalir. Aside from Ibn Ezra's objection to the grammatical liberty that Kalir takes in constructing new words and new usages, Ibn Ezra also objects to the writing style of Kalir – often, his words allude to ideas and events but have no obvious meaning. Ibn Ezra notes that piyutim and selichos are prayers, and as such, the main focus should be ensuring that people understand what they are saying, something very challenging in Kalir's works. Instead, Ibn Ezra recommends the piyutim of Rav Saadyah, which can be understood easily because they are written clearly.

In this, Ibn Ezra influenced the style of the Sefardic piyutim, where the poetry is easier to understand, and is therefore often very different from that of the Ashkenazim, which is heavily based on and influenced by the poetry of Rav Kalir. This difference is noted by many authorities. For example, Shu't Maharshdam (Orach Chayim #35), writes that he prefers the piyutim of the Sefardim, written predominantly by Rav Yehudah Halevi, Ibn Ezra and Rav Shelomoh ibn Gabirol, because they write in a clear way that is easy to understand. (The Ashkenazic use of Rav Kalir's writings is somewhat influenced by the opinion of the Arizal, who, although he lived among Sefardim, himself used the piyutim of Kalir which, he said, are based on deep kabbalistic understanding [see, for example, Shu't Minchas Elazar 1:11].)

Had Ibn Ezra's approach been accepted, our Tisha B'Av kinos, most of which are taken from the writings of Kalir, would be far more comprehensible. The same can be said for much of our piyutim on Yomim Nora'im and, for those who recite them, on the other Yomim Tovim.

#### His Personal History

In addition to his prolific writings of piyutim and selichos, Ibn Ezra authored much personal poetry, in some of which he describes aspects of his difficult life. He was born and lived his early life in Moslem Spain, but was forced to flee Spain during an uprising and civil war between rival Moslem groups. (Does any of this sound familiar?) His travels at this time took him wandering through Italy, France, England, and back to France. He lived in dire poverty, and it appears that he spent the rest of his life wandering from community to community. There is evidence that he may at one time have traveled as far as Eretz Yisroel and Egypt. For example, he is very familiar with Egyptian geography, describing in detail the distance between the land of Ramses and the government headquarters at the time prior to the Exodus, which he notes was a distance of six parsa'os, or

about 4.5 miles (commentary to Shemos 12:31). He understood that the purpose of some of the pyramids was to store the grain in Yosef's day (commentary to Shemos 12:31).

He suffered much great personal tragedy, including the loss of his wife as a young woman and several of his children. While Ibn Ezra was wandering through Europe, one son, Yitzchak, apparently a talmid chacham of note, fled to Baghdad, where he was forced to convert to Islam. When he was able to, he returned to Judaism, and wrote that he had always observed the mitzvos and made a statement recognizing Islam only in order to avoid being killed. Shortly thereafter, Yitzchak passed on. Meanwhile, his father, back in Europe, was unaware of these events, and found out about them some three years after his son's passing.

We have no idea where Ibn Ezra was when he died, or where he was buried.

#### Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Tam

During his travels in France, Ibn Ezra made the acquaintance of Rabbeinu Tam, and they continued their correspondence afterward. In two places (Rosh Hashanah 13a s.v. De'akrivu and Kiddushin 37b s.v. Mimacharas), Tosafos mentions Torah discussion between Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Tam. In a third place (Taanis 20b s.v. Behachinaso), Tosafos mentions Ibn Ezra in an interesting context. Tosafos there explains the concept of family names, something unheard of among Ashkenazic Jewry in their day, whereas Ibn Ezra was, indeed, a family name. As Avraham Ibn Ezra, our hero, mentions in the introduction to some of his works, his father's name was Meir.

We will continue this article about Ibn Ezra in a few weeks, be"H.

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#### **THE JERUSALEM POST - Israel's 'chained' women: Women struggle with the rabbinate for a divorce by Sarah Levi**

The Center for Women's Justice was founded in 2004 by attorney Susan Weiss, who sees the aguna situation getting better and worse at the same time.

According to Jewish law, when a marriage can no longer continue, it is the sole duty of the husband to present his wife a get (religious bill of divorce) in front of a rabbinical court in order to terminate the marriage. What happens if the wife wants to divorce her husband and he refuses to let her go?

This creates a phenomenon where the wife becomes an aguna (Hebrew for a "chained woman"). Each year are created hundreds of reported and unreported cases of women unable to halachically terminate their marriages. Tzvia Gordesky, who has been chained to her husband for the past 17 years, has sought to increase media coverage of her situation. With a hunger strike attempt in front of the Knesset, she has raised awareness about her plight and that of hundreds of women who find themselves not only at the mercy of abusive husbands, but also the victims of an unhelpful rabbinate and an unresponsive government.

Today the situation does not seem to be improving. As surveys indicate, 19% of women in the process of divorce are denied a get, which translates to some 3,000 chained women.

While this issue plagues the country, there are groups committed to bringing about change to ensure the safety and dignity of these women. They are working to help them find ways to not be completely dependent on their husbands to terminate a marriage.

Although their aim is to put an end to this situation, and these groups generally work together to help these chained women, at the end of the day they are in competition with one another when it comes to outside funding and resources.

The first group, which came into existence over 20 years ago, is Yad L'isha, the Monica Dennis Goldberg Legal Aid Center, part of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Ohr Torah Stone organization. The group offers solutions to the aguna problem through religious means that work within the framework of Jewish law and practice.

Yad L'isha handles some 150 cases a year under the leadership of director Pnina Omer. She oversees a team of rabbinical court advocates, most of whom are civil attorneys who are experts in Jewish law and fluent in the language of the religious courts. In addition, the staff also includes social workers who handle the emotional and day-to-day stress involved in the process.

Omer explains the urgency of the issue. "The issue of mesuravot get [women denied divorce by recalcitrant husbands] and agunot is one of the most difficult issues facing the Jewish world," she says.

"As an organization experienced in the halachic discourse on the matter of agunot, we try to promote halachic solutions within the religious courts; but the public should not sit idly by. Society must take responsibility and use the tools which are available to change our future reality."

She notes the history behind the marriage and divorce process in the Jewish community, and how often in the past women were protected from what we are seeing today. "Historically, Judaism was the most advanced religion in the world in relation to divorce and the rights of women.

"The ketuba [marriage contract] was designed to protect women's rights, and Rabbi Gershom – known as the Light of the Diaspora, who lived during the Middle Ages – enacted an edict declaring that a woman may not be divorced against her will, and that just as a husband delivers the get, a wife must agree to accept it.

"The spirit of the Halacha is to do everything possible to release agunot from their chains and be lenient in the laws relating to agunot; this has been the Jewish custom throughout the years."

However, something changed in modern times, when Omer says an erosion of the afore-mentioned approach occurred. "Today, being a woman in the process of divorce has become a disadvantage.

"In addition, the process itself has changed over the years. Today, the majority of cases are the result of the husband's refusal to give his wife a get, rather than the result of a tragedy which caused the husband to disappear.

"The premeditated, intentional creation of agunot through get-refusal is a cynical and despicable misuse of halacha. The matter has become a social phenomenon. As a social activist and a religious woman, I felt driven to devote my time and energy to this cause," Omer says.

She also believes that creating a stigma within religious communities toward men who refuse to give their wives a get could also prove effective. "First, we must adopt an uncompromising stance which eradicates get-refusal. People tend not to get involved, but we must all understand that it is our moral and ethical obligation to say no to aginut [the state of being an aguna].

"Not to conduct business with a get-refuser, not to study with him, not to greet him, not to allow him to be called up to the Torah and more, all in the spirit of the exclusionary sanctions outlined by Rabbeinu Tam."

However, Omer explains that across the board a key solution is knowledge and preparedness before the wedding. "It is important to promote the signing of prenuptial agreements. We must bring forth a reality in which no couple would entertain the thought of getting

married without this insurance certificate, through which they are taking responsibility for each other's freedom.

"It is also worthwhile to sign a contract of obligation, so that if the husband becomes incapacitated and is unable to give his wife a get – in cases of medical or mental illness, for example – he preappoints an emissary who is permitted to release his wife."

Unlike Yad L'isha, the Rackman Center uses civil law to help solve the problem. According to its website, the center believes in a "dual-track approach for bringing about mobilization and social change." It works both within and beyond the religious world to change the Jewish legal system using its own tools and methodology, at the same time enabling each citizen of Israel a choice of marriage ceremonies which suit their beliefs.

Ruth Halpern-Kedari, an accomplished lawyer specializing in family law, heads the Rackman Center. Involved in the struggle to end the aguna crisis for the past 10 years, Halpern-Kedari realizes that family law is key, and this is where women's rights are being hampered.

"The State of Israel does not permit civil marriages and divorces," she notes. For her, this goes to the heart of the matter, explaining that, in terms of Jewish law, matters of divorce are entirely in the hands of men.

"I don't want to use the word crazy, but it's just unthinkable, and to have to explain this to scholars and people in other countries – it just does not make sense. This is not a democratic state. That our lawmakers do not allow people to control their personal realms and rights, forcing religious laws on people, is a violation of the state's citizens and it is not democratic."

She explains that the rabbinical court system opens the door to a number of abuses by which women become victims of extortion. If a woman wants a divorce, the husband can take full liberties with children and money, and according to Halpern-Kedari, most of the women dealing with this come from more religious and less educated homes.

The group Mavoi Satum ("dead end") has been around since 1995 for chained women in Israel. In addition to providing legal representation for agunot, the group also offers emotional and psychological support as well as "empowerment training."

On a larger scale, Mavoi Satum advocates for reform in Israel's legal system that governs marriage and divorce, plus a public awareness campaign.

Ruth Tik has been in charge of the social services wing of Mavoi Satum for the past eight years. She believes that in addition to the legal help the group is offering, the work that they do on an individual level is crucial, not only in remedying the problem, but also in preventing it.

"By providing necessary social aid, including courses such as 'handywoman' courses, and offering agunot advice on how to speak to the press, the women not only become empowered, but they become agents of change," Tik explains.

The legal issues are vital, but individual women also need to be taken care of in addition to raising general awareness to prevent more agunot cases in the future.

Tik further describes the work of Mavoi Satum in terms of raising awareness, including advocating for civil marriages and prenuptial agreements.

Not all of the chained women come from haredi or even religious backgrounds. According to Tik, some 30% are secular and the group

has always helped women who are not religious. “People should be aware when their kids get married. This problem does not only affect the haredim. Knowledge is the most important part.”

The Center for Women’s Justice was founded in 2004 by attorney Susan Weiss, who sees the aguna situation getting better and worse at the same time.

“I’m seeing a polarization in both ways – the public is way more sensitive than before. The awareness is much greater, and prenuptial agreements are helping. I don’t think a man should determine a divorce in the 21st century.

“Ancient law should not be guiding us in a democratic state. We have to have civil marriage and divorce in Israel.”

Dedicating her entire professional career to the aguna, Weiss began volunteering at the Women’s International Zionist Organization when she arrived in Israel years ago. While working there, she saw the rights of women being compromised and decided to take matters into her own hands, and opened a legal practice for women struggling to get a divorce.

She laments what she sees as an absurd situation; that the agunot matter is still an issue in today’s Israel.

“The state is divided into two,” she says. “One is that women can be fighter pilots, and two, that they can’t get a divorce.”

Weiss believes that the government best serves its citizens through civil law. However, the religious arm of the government is inhibiting people’s civil rights from becoming a reality.

“Once the power of the rabbinate in Israel is diminished and civil law prevails, then issues of human rights, especially ones concerning the agunot, will improve, by not getting married through the rabbinate and signing prenuptial agreements. All of this is helping us, I hope,” Weiss adds.

Overall, the general consensus among these groups is clear. The problem of the aguna is too large to ignore and all of these groups are striving to come up with viable solutions, both social and legal. They see that the government is an important tool to enact policy changes that will protect these women and that reflect the will of the people and not the rabbinate.

In the meantime, being aware of alternatives to prevent future cases of agunot is an important step that these groups are getting behind, in addition to working within the rabbinical courts and the government to free our chained women.

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## **Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32)**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, so that they shall not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7)

What is the connection between Adam’s existential state of aloneness and the tragic social isolation which results from the Tower of Babel, when one universal language is replaced by seventy languages, leading to bedlam, confusion and dispersion?

To answer our question, let us begin by returning to the story of creation and G-d’s declaration: “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a help-opposite for him” (Gen.2:18). When Adam fails to find his ‘help-opposite’ among the animals, we are told: “The Lord G-d cast a deep sleep upon man and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place, and of the rib, which the L-rd G-d had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:21-22).

Why is the birth of Eve surrounded with this poetic quality? Why does her creation differ radically from all other creatures?

The answer is that had Eve been created from the earth like the rest of the animals, Adam would have related to her as a two-legged creature. Even if she walked and talked, she would end up as one of the animals to name and control. Her unique ‘birth’ marks her unique role.

In an earlier verse, we read that “G-d created the human being in His image; in the image of G-d He created him, male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:27). “Male and female” suggests androgynous qualities, and on that verse, Rashi quotes a midrashic interpretation that G-d originally created the human with two “faces,” Siamese twins as it were, so that when He put Adam into a deep sleep, it was not just to remove a rib but to separate the female side from the male side.

G-d divided the creature into two so that each half would seek completion in the other. Had Eve not emerged from Adam’s own flesh to begin with, they could never have become one flesh again.

Awakening, Adam said of Eve, “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (2:23). His search was over, and what was true for Adam is true for humankind. In the next verse, G-d announced the second basic principle in life: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (2:24). “Leave” does not mean reject; but it does mean that one must be mature and independent in order to enter into a relationship of mutuality with one’s mate. (How many divorces can be traced to crippling parent-child relationships!)

One of the goals of a human being is to become one flesh with another human being, and this, the truest of partnerships, can only be achieved with someone who is really part of yourself, only with someone to whom you cleave intellectually and emotionally. If a relationship suffers from a lack of concern and commitment, then sexuality suffers as well. The Torah wants us to know that for humans, sexual relations are not merely a function of procreative needs, but rather an expression of mutuality on a profound level. Hence, in contrast to the animal kingdom, humans are not controlled by periods of heat; sexuality is ever-present. Thus Nahmanides speaks of one flesh in allegoric terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one.

Rashi interprets the verse, “You shall become one flesh” to mean that in the newborn child, mother and father literally become one flesh. In the child, part of us lives on even after we die.

The entire sequence ends with the startling statement, “And they were both naked, and they were not ashamed” (2:25). Given the Torah’s strict standards of modesty how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

I would suggest a more symbolic explanation: Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal their souls without external pretense. Frequently, we play games, pretending to be what we’re not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word ‘begeg’ (garment) comes from the same root as ‘bagod’ – to betray. With garments I can betray; wearing my role as I hide my true self. The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, so that they are free to express fears and frustrations, not afraid to cry and scream in each other’s presence without feeling the “shame of nakedness.” This is the ideal ‘ezer kenegdo.’

The first global catastrophe, the flood, struck when the world rejected the ideal relationship between man and woman. Rape, pillage, and unbridled lust became the norm. Only one family on earth – Noah’s remained righteous. Now, with the Tower of Babel, whatever values Noah attempted to transmit to future generations were forgotten.

What exactly happened when one language became seventy is difficult to understand. Yet, metaphorically, one language means

people understand each other. With their 'ezer-kenegdos,' existential and social loneliness is kept at bay as they become one in love and in progeny.

The Tower of Babel represents a new stage of depravity, not sexual, but social. People wanted to create a great name by building great towers, not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of materialism; the new god became splendid achievements with mortar and brick. As they reached greater physical heights, they forgot the human, inter-personal value of a friend, a wife, a life's partner. According to the Midrash, when a person fell off the Tower, work continued, but if a brick crashed to the ground, people mourned.

Thus the total breakdown of language fits the crime of people who may be physically alive, but whose tongues and hearts are locked – people who are no longer communicating with each other. It was no longer possible for two people to become one flesh and one bone, to stand naked without shame, to become 'ezer-kenegdos.' Existential loneliness engulfed the world and intercommunication was forgotten. The powerful idea of one language became a vague memory.

The Tower of Babel ended an era in the history of mankind, and the social destruction it left behind could only be fixed by Abraham. His message of a G-d of compassion who wishes to unite the world in love and morality is still waiting to be heard.  
Shabbat Shalom

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### **Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"ta**

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Eye Color

Q: Are the color of one's eyes connected to his soul?

A: No.

Marriage Between People with the Same Name

Q: Is it permissible for a man and woman with the same first name to be married?

A: Yes (This is also the ruling of Ha-Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Neiman, who served as Av Beit Din of the Machzikei Ha-Dat of Belz in Montreal. He states that although he had not heard such a ruling before, we should not add strictures that are not mentioned in Tzava'at Rebbe Yehudah Ha-Chasid. Shut Agurah Be-Ohalecha Volume 3, Even Ha-Ezer #2).

Fashion Designer

Q: [Question from a woman]: I am a fashion designer for women's evening wear. Is it permissible? Are there limitations?

A: It is permissible on condition that the clothing is modest.

University Paper

Q: Is it permissible for me to write a university paper for someone else?

A: Ask the professor directly.

Translating the Kaddish

Q: Why don't we translate the Kaddish into Hebrew?

A: Because a translation cannot be precise. In many Siddurim, however, there is a translation of the Kaddish, so that a person can quickly understand the Aramaic words of this prayer.

Difficulty in Learning

Q: It is difficult for me to learn Gemara. Is there hope for me?

A: Certainly. It was also difficult for Ha-Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spector to learn. And also Maharam Shick. And also Rabbi Akiva.

Passing Kiddush to My Mother or My Wife

Q: If I am eating a Shabbat meal with my mother and my wife, to whom should I first pass the Kiddush? If I first give it to my wife, my mother will be insulted, and visa-versa.

A: The question is not formulated correctly. You and your wife are one, and should decide together what to do (See the answers of Gedolei Yisrael on this question in Shut Ha-Shoel #37).

Shirt with the Verse "Hashem is the King"

Q: Is it permissible to wear a shirt which has the verse "Hashem is the King" printed on it?

A: 1. It must be covered when one enters the restroom. 2. Gedolei Yisrael and G-d-fearing Jews throughout the generations did not write verses of their clothing but upon their hearts and their actions.

Torah Classes on Cell Phone

Q: If one listens to Torah classes on his cell phone, computer or MP3, does he fulfill the obligation to set six times for learning Torah?

A: Yes. It is obviously preferable to learn from a Rabbi face-to-face.

Divrei Torah at Meals

Q: On the one hand, the Gemara Ta'anit (5b) says not to speak during meals because there is a fear of choking on the food, while on the other hand, Pirkei Avot (3:3) says that a meal without Divrei Torah is like eating the sacrifices of the dead. Isn't this a contradiction?

A: It means that one should not talk during the actually eating, but it is a Mitzvah to say Divrei Torah between the eating. Mishnah Berurah (170:1-2).

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### **Noah: Permission to Eat Meat – Rav Kook**

After God destroyed His world by water, making a fresh start with Noah and his family, God told Noah, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. Like plant vegetation [which I permitted to Adam], I have now given you everything. ... Only of the blood of your own lives will I demand an account." (Gen. 9:3,5)

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

Temporary Allowance

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

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

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

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

## Preparing for the Future

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

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

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

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## Hilchos Shabbos

### 7823. "Eruv Chatzeiros in an Apt Building or 2 Family House"

As discussed previously, residents of an apartment building or a 2 (or more) family house require an Eruv to be able to carry to and from the common halls and from one apartment to another. However, if the Owner of the building maintains a Muktzeh item (i.e. something valuable or delicate) or an unmovable item (i.e. Refrigerator/Freezer, or other heavy appliance) upon which he retains ownership, within the rented apartment(s) the Owner has effectively retained a Halachic right of total ownership of the apartment, with the tenant as only a visitor/guest.

7824. In this circumstance, all parties are permitted to carry between the apartments and halls without the need for an eruv. In many instances Landlords commonly supply the tenant with a Refrigerator and Stove and this would qualify to allow the residents to carry without an eruv. However, the Owner/Landlord must maintain the heavy appliance in all the apartment units for this to be effective. Before relying on this heter one must discuss the particular circumstances with a Rov.

Shulchan Aruch w/Mishnah Brurah 366:1, 370:2, Sefer 39 Melochos

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## The Trace of God Noach 5778

The story of the first eight chapters of Bereishit is tragic but simple: creation, followed by de-creation, followed by re-creation. God creates order. Humans then destroy that order, to the point where “the world was filled with violence,” and “all flesh had corrupted its way on earth.” God brings a flood that wipes away all life, until – with the exception of Noach, his family and other animals – the earth has returned to the state it was in at the beginning of Torah, when “the earth was waste and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

Vowing never again to destroy all life – though not guaranteeing that humanity might not do so of its own accord – God begins again, this time with Noach in place of Adam, father of a new start to the human story. Genesis 9 is therefore parallel to Genesis 1. But there are two significant differences.

In both there is a keyword, repeated seven times, but it is a different word. In Genesis 1 the word is tov, “good.” In Genesis 9, the word is brit, “covenant.” That is the first difference.

The second is that they both state that God made the human person in His image, but they do so in markedly different ways. In Genesis 1 we read:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every moving thing that moves upon the earth.”\

So God created man in His image,  
In the image of God He created him,  
Male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)  
And this is how it is stated in Genesis 9:  
Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed;  
For in the image of God, He made man. (Gen. 9:6)

The difference here is fundamental. Genesis 1 tells me that I am in the image of God. Genesis 9 tells me that the other person is in the image of God. Genesis 1 speaks about the dominance of Homo sapiens over the rest of creation. Genesis 9 speaks about the sanctity of life and the prohibition of murder. The first chapter tells us about the potential power of human beings, while the ninth chapter tells us about the moral limits of that power. We may not use it to deprive another person of life.

This also explains why the keyword, repeated seven times, changes from “good” to “covenant.” When we call something good, we are speaking about how it is in itself. But when we speak of covenant, we are talking about relationships. A covenant is a moral bond between persons.

What differentiates the world after the Flood from the world before is that the terms of the human condition have changed. God no longer expects people to be good because it is in their nature to be so. To the contrary, God now knows that “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood” (Gen. 8:21) – and this despite the fact that we were created in God’s image.

The difference is that there is only one God. If there were only one human being, he or she might live at peace with the world. But we know that this could not be the case because “It is not good for man to be alone.” We are social animals. And when one human being thinks he or she has godlike powers vis-à-vis another human being, the result is violence. Therefore, thinking yourself godlike, if you are human, all-too-human, is very dangerous indeed.

That is why, with one simple move, God transformed the terms of the equation. After the Flood, He taught Noach (and through him all humanity), that we should think, not of ourselves but of the human other as in the image of God. That is the only way to save ourselves from violence and self-destruction.

This really is a life-changing idea. It means that the greatest religious challenge is: Can I see God’s image in one who is not in my image – whose colour, class, culture or creed is different from mine?

People fear people not like them. That has been a source of violence for as long as there has been human life on earth. The stranger, the foreigner, the outsider, is almost always seen as a threat. But what if the opposite is the case? What if the people not like us enlarge rather than endanger our world?

There is a strange blessing we say after eating or drinking something over which we make the blessing shehako. It goes: borei nefashot rabbot vechesronam. God “creates many souls and their deficiencies.” Understood literally, it is almost incomprehensible. Why should we praise God who creates deficiencies?

One beautiful answer[1] is that if we had no deficiencies, then lacking nothing, we would never need anyone else. We would be solitary rather than social. The fact that we are all different, and all have deficiencies, means that we need one another. What you lack, I may have, and what I lack, you may have. It is by coming together that we can each give the other something he or she lacks. It is our deficiencies and differences that brings us together in mutual gain, in a win-win scenario.[2] It is our diversity that makes us social animals. This is the insight expressed in the famous rabbinic statement: "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint, they all come out the same. God makes us all in the same mint, the same image, His image, and we all come out different." [3] This is the basis of what I call – it was the title of one of my books – the dignity of difference. This is a life-changing idea. Next time we meet someone radically unlike us, we should try seeing difference not as a threat but as an enlarging, possibility-creating gift. After the Flood, and to avoid a world "filled with violence" that led to the Flood in the first place, God asks us to see His image in one who is not in my image.

Adam knew that he was in the image of God. Noah and his descendants are commanded to remember that the other person is in the image of God. The great religious challenge is: Can I see a trace of God in the face of a stranger?

*Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*

[1] I thank Mr Joshua Rowe of Manchester from whom I first heard this lovely idea.

[2] This is what led thinkers like Montesquieu in the eighteenth century to conceptualise trade as an alternative to war. When two different tribes meet, they can either trade or fight. If they fight, one at least will lose and the other, too, will suffer losses. If they trade, both will gain. This is one of the most important contributions of the market economy to peace, tolerance and the ability to see difference as a blessing, not a curse. See Albert O. Hirschman, *The passions and the interests: political arguments for capitalism before its triumph*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

[3] Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5.

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## **Selling a Defective Product** **Yonoson Rosenblum**

Sometimes one reads something that primarily inspires pity for the author. That was my reaction to a piece in Tablet by Marco Greenberg entitled, "Forget Koufax: My Son Will Play Football This Yom Kippur, and I'm Fine with That."

Greenberg's son Noam attends a Connecticut prep school "that takes sports seriously." When Noam informs his father that he made the football team, the latter beams with pride. But that pride quickly turns to something else when Noam shares that he will be playing on Yom Kippur. Marco spends a sleepless night wondering whether he failed as a parent and fretting about what his friends in synagogue will say if they find out how Noam spent the holiest day of the Jewish year.

Above all, he thinks about how the great Dodgers pitcher Sandy Koufax thrilled American Jews with his refusal to pitch the opening game of the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur. (Koufax's replacement, fellow Hall of Famer Don Drysdale, was hit hard, and when manager Walt Alton came to the mound to remove him, Drysdale remarked dryly, "I bet you wish I were Jewish too.") But by the morning, Marco Greenberg has made peace with his son's "choosing to eat a hearty breakfast and gear up for the game on Yom Kippur." His son's decision not to pray, he declares, reflects the greater security of Jews in America today than in 1965. Today Jews are everywhere and don't have to worry any longer about how they will be perceived by Jews or gentiles, or whether putting football above rituals makes them any less Jewish.

Noam, his father writes by way of justification, is more comfortable in his Jewish skin than his father's generation was. Judaism for him is

not about what he does, but who he is. He has grown up in New York City around other Jews, attended Solomon Schechter for elementary school, has visited Israel numerous times, and "rocked his bar mitzvah in fluent Hebrew."

A day school elementary education and numerous trips to Israel place Noam at the very upper end of Jewish identity for non-Orthodox youngsters. And yet, the most compelling argument for not playing football that his father — the source of those trips to Israel and that expensive day school education — can come up with for not doing so is: Sandy Koufax did not pitch in the World Series on Yom Kippur. Even Marco's argument that a more secure American Jewry no longer needs expressions of Jewish pride fails on its own terms. On the eve of the very Yom Kippur that Noam suited up for his prep school, Israeli tennis player Dudi Sela walked off the court of a pro tournament in China as Yom Kippur approached, thereby not only forfeiting a quarterfinal match, but \$30,000 in prize money and valuable ranking points. Sela presumably grew up around as many Jews as are to be found in the New York City neighborhoods in which Noam was raised, and is no less secure in his Jewish identity.

I cannot really blame Noam too much, given the quality of arguments for choosing Yom Kippur over football he has heard. As presented to him, Yom Kippur is just another ancient ritual that Jews have long performed. He has never heard Yom Kippur spoken of with awe as an unfathomable gift from the Ribbono Shel Olam — as the one day a year when our yetzer has no ability to importune us, as a once-in-the-year opportunity to become, in Rav Hutner's unforgettable phrase, not just a *besser mensch* but an *anderer mensch*. Divine command is absent from his father's wavering account.

Nor am I prepared to give up on Noam's Jewish future. Perhaps someday he will look back in shame at his choice to play football on Yom Kippur, and that shame will propel him to explore more closely what Yom Kippur really means. I've witnessed many stranger journeys.

But more likely, his father, Marco, will write another article a decade from now entitled, "My Solomon Schechter-educated Son Is Intermarrying, and I'm Fine with That." Again, he will console himself that Noam's Judaism is not determined by what he does, but by who he is (whatever that means). And no doubt he will recall again how Noam "rocked his bar mitzvah."

I DWELL ON THIS PATHETIC LITTLE ESSAY because I see it as emblematic of the larger failure of non-Orthodox American Jewry to provide its young, even its most Jewishly-educated young, with any remotely coherent reason for why they should observe the mitzvos for which hundreds of thousands of their ancestors gave their lives. "It's an ancient Jewish tradition" won't do it. Experiencing Yom Kippur as a Divine command from the Creator of the Universe, Who singled out the Jews from among all peoples of the world with a special love, just might.

That failure is inextricably tied to another one: The heterodox movements have not provided their followers with any convincing reason why the collective existence of the Jewish People makes a difference. And as a result, non-Orthodox American Jewry has entered a demographic death cycle.

The 2013 study of Jewish Americans by the Pew Research Center projected a future for American Jewry that is increasingly Orthodox. Steven Cohen, research professor of Jewish social policy at the Hebrew Union College (Reform), and two colleagues recently extrapolated the findings in a Forward article entitled, "Does Orthodox Explosion Signal Doom for Conservative and Reform?"

Approximately one-third of American Jews profess no denominational affiliation, but that percentage spikes sharply among those in the ages 20-29 cohort to 45 percent, suggesting that many children of Reform and Conservative parents have "eschewed their childhood



denominational identities." The number of Conservative and Reform Jews in the 30-39 cohort is only half of that in the baby boomer cohort (60-69), reflecting a rapid decline in those movements.

Among the Orthodox, by contrast, the trend is sharply in the opposite direction: There are three times as many in the younger cohort (30-39) as in the baby boomer cohort. And those trend lines are only accelerating as we move down the age scale. To bring home the divergence between rapid Orthodox growth and sharp heterodox decline, Cohen et al compare the number of grandchildren's photos likely to be found in the wallets of 100 heterodox Jews grandparents and a comparable group of Orthodox grandparents. The answer in the former case is 56; in the latter, 575, over ten times more.

Among the baby boomers, heterodox outnumber Orthodox Jews by a ratio of 14:1. By the time we reach the 30-39 cohort, that ratio has declined to 2:1, and among the youngest cohort of 1-9, that ratio drops still further to 3:2.

Only the Orthodox, the authors conclude, are avoiding rapid population decline. The number of heterodox Jewish kids between 0-9 is one-half the cohort of 50-59. Among the Orthodox, however, the number of those in the younger cohort is three times the number in the older cohort.

Steven Cohen and his co-authors -- like Jack Wertheimer, the former provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) -- deserve credit for their clear-eyed and honest depiction of the disappearance of the Reform and Conservative movements. I have only one quibble with the article: the title. The rapid growth of Orthodoxy does not doom the heterodox movements. Rather, they have doomed themselves by their failure to sell a compelling product. There is no inherent reason why all of American Jewry could not be growing, rather than Orthodoxy enjoying an "explosion" and the heterodox movements experiencing rapid decline.

But that parallel growth is not happening. Indeed, as things stand now, the best chance that older Reform or Conservative Jews in their forties, fifties, and sixties have of ever seeing Jewish grandchildren is if one of their children finds his or her way to a campus kiruv program or to an Orthodox shul or learning forum. Unfortunately, that is not yet happening in great enough numbers to stanch the flow of Jews out of all connection to communal life.

#### A Shabbos Table that Works

Welcome to Our Table is the newest offering from Ari Wasserman, who was recently featured in these pages for his comprehensive guide for bnei Torah entering the workplace, Making It Work.

The Wassermans entertain large groups at Shabbos meals in their Jerusalem home on a weekly basis. Welcome to Our Table is a compilation of divrei Torah said by Reb Ari at the Shabbos table, the questions asked based on that davar Torah, and some of the most interesting responses.

The questions asked are all personal in nature and ones that can be answered with or without any background in Torah learning: What's one challenge you've faced or are currently facing? What brief encounter, social interaction, class, etc., made a significant, lasting impression on you for better or worse?

My wife and I have twice had the opportunity to observe how this works in practice in recent months. The first time was at a Shabbos lunch where the guest list of over 20 included four or five older couples, talmidim at Ohr Somayach (one of the several institutions at which Reb Ari teaches), a chassan and kallah, and her mother.

But once we started going around the table, responding to the question based on the devar Torah, this disparate group engaged in a single conversation. Everyone shared something of importance to themselves. I was amazed when my wife of nearly 40 years described

a life-changing comment that someone made to her that she had never mentioned before.

About six weeks later, we returned to the Wassermans for a Leil Shabbos meal with a group of Hollywood agents and executives, along with the Israeli consul to Los Angeles. Once again, people opened up in surprising ways that revealed how deeply moved they were by the Shabbos meal.

I've discovered one other important use for Welcome to Our Table. Our Shabbos table can become fairly unruly when a number of married couples are present at the same time with their children. Discussion tends to break down into multiple separate conversations. Using Welcome to Our Table, we have been able to focus the discussion and bring everyone together — at least for a while.

So my highest praise of Welcome to Our Table is that it works.

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#### *OU Torah*

##### *Noah's Virtues*

*Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb*

Let us consider this scenario. You work for a company in which each employee has a detailed job description, which serves as the basis for his or her semi-annual evaluation. Promotions, bonuses, and raises all depend upon this evaluation.

Now imagine that your fellow employee, with whom you are somewhat competitive, receives the bonus that you anticipated but, to your chagrin, did not receive. So, you go to the boss, with whom you are quite friendly, and ask for an explanation. He responds, but instead of citing your fellow worker's outstanding job performance, he simply says, "I like the guy!"

At the very least, you would be quite disappointed and would probably protest the unfairness of assessing work performance on the basis of "liking the guy."

Let us consider another scenario, from a different walk of life. You and your friend Charles are classmates in a graduate-level course in physics. You both study together, and you know full well that you've mastered the material and that Charles has not, certainly not to the extent that you have. When the class rankings are announced, you discover that Charles is number one, and that you're much lower on the list. You go to the professor and demand an explanation. He admits that your test score was higher than Charles', but explains that he ranked Charles higher in the class standings because "he finds favor in my eyes!"

Would any self-respecting student accept such blatant favoritism? I bet that you would sooner appear in the department chairman's office to register your protest.

We have every right to expect fairness in all of our interactions, whether in a business setting or in an educational one. One would think that we certainly have the right to expect fairness from the Almighty. Surely, He does not play favorites. And yet, reading the story of Noah, who is the hero of this week's Torah portion and after whom the portion is named, we find a phrase which makes us wonder. Truth to tell, the troublesome phrase does not appear in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32). If we read only the very first verse in this week's parsha we discover that Noah was spared from the great deluge because of his very real merit: "Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God." The rest of the Earth was "corrupt before God... and filled with lawlessness." Noah had an excellent "job performance" and solid "test scores." He deserved the "bonus" and earned his status at the top of his class fairly and squarely.

But were Noah's virtues the reason that the Almighty chose to spare him?

To answer this question correctly, I must refer you to a rule I try to impress upon my students in all of my classes about the weekly Torah portion. I find that we often assume that the narrative of each portion begins at its beginning. We fail to recall that the point of departure for

every Torah portion is the final passage in the previous week's Torah portion. Before proceeding with any week's new parsha, we must at least glance at the concluding verses of the previous week's parsha. Therefore, if we are to fully understand Parshas Noach, we must turn the pages back to the final episode in Parshas Bereshit. There we read: The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth... Nothing but evil all the time.

The Lord regretted that he had made man and said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created... For I regret that I made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Note that the Torah does not say that the Lord spared Noah because he was not a wicked nor evil, but just and righteous. No! The Torah says, "Noah found favor with the Lord." "Noach matza chen..." The Almighty simply "liked the guy."

Are we to believe that Noah was spared not because of his moral rectitude, but because he was a likable "nice guy?" Because he had chen (often translated as "charm")?

For a highly original and most provocative answer to this question, we must turn to the commentary of the great early 18th century scholar and kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar, who began his long life in North Africa but who emigrated to the Holy Land, where he today lies buried upon the Mount of Olives. Like many other great sages, he is best known by the title of his masterful commentary upon the Torah, Ohr HaChaim (or "Chaim's Light").

Let me paraphrase his explanation: The Almighty regretted His entire "experiment." Mankind was discovered to be prone to evil and perversion. The Lord's reaction, as it were, was to destroy the world and start all over again. There would be no exception for those rare individuals who were righteous. A new beginning was the only answer. But among those individuals was a man who had special "charm;" a special smile, perhaps, or some other irresistibly likable feature. So, the Lord decided not to terminate the experiment, but to persist with His creation. Instead, He would allow this one fellow who "found favor in His eyes" to launch a new beginning, together with his immediate family.

Noah was indeed "righteous and blameless." But those virtues were not what saved him. He was saved because "he found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

But how does one find favor in the eyes of the Lord? Ohr HaChaim explains that it is not as simple as having a winning smile or a likable demeanor. Here is his theory:

"Chen, favor, is achieved through the performance of certain special mitzvot, or good deeds. For you must know that there are several mitzvot that are designed to bestow chen upon a person. That is, three or four specific mitzvot that are not made known to man. If they were, we would all perform only those good deeds and no others. Noah, probably unknowingly, performed the very mitzvot that would gain him favor in the eyes of the Almighty."

That is the conclusion of Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar's comment. But it is not the end of my story.

Rabbi ibn Atar's comment was initially brought to my attention by the late Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, in one of his weekly lectures. Since then, I have had many occasions to use the concept of these several mysterious mitzvot that earn the Lord's favor, His good graces.

I use it in classroom settings, in Shabbat table conversations, and occasionally even in sermons. I ask others to come up with their own suggestions or guesses as to what these three or four special "hidden" mitzvot might be.

Some respond and say that these must be mitzvot that help other people. Charity perhaps, or meticulous ethical behavior. Others assume that these must be mitzvot that entail great spiritual piety.

So, dear reader, I ask you. What do you suppose are these three or four mitzvot? If you are at a loss, bring the question up at your Shabbat table this Friday night. Perhaps one of your guests, or, more likely, one of your young children, will have the right answers. Shabbat Shalom.

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Although this week's parasha, parashat Noah, focuses primarily on the Flood, it also traces the history of humankind following the Flood. After the passing of Noah, the Torah lists the names of the children of Noah and describes the repopulation of the world.

The Bible, in Genesis 10:1 states, וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת בְּנֵי נֹחַ, שֵׁם הֵם וְנִצְחָת, וְיָפֶת, וְיָמָבֹוּל . These are the descendants of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the Flood.

Although there is a rabbinic dispute regarding which of Noah's three sons was the oldest, certainly the most significant child is Shem, from whom the Semitic nations and the Jews are descended. The three sons of Noah, eventually, were also the progenitors of the seventy nations who inhabited the world in those days. Abraham was a tenth generation descendent of Noah, through his son Shem.

A particularly notable descendent of Shem was his fifth generation great-grandson, עֵבֶר -Eber, who, according to rabbinic sources, played a key role in resurrecting the world after its near destruction in the time of Noah. According to the Midrash, Eber was one of the few righteous men in those times, who along with his great, great-grandfather Shem, established a yeshiva. Since the Torah had not yet been given, speculation is that Shem and Eber, like Abraham, had rationally come to the conclusion of the existence of many of the ethical and moral laws that eventually would be revealed in the Torah. At their house of study, Shem and Eber spent time studying and propagating these principles, trying to inspire the world to follow, at least, the basic laws of humanity. Maimonides, in the Laws of Idolatry 1:1, regards Eber as one of the few individuals along with Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, and Shem, who came to the conclusion that there was one Creator, despite the fact that all of humanity at that time was worshipping idols.

The name Eber, in Hebrew, means "to come across." The Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 3, explains that Eber and his family came across from the other side of the Euphrates River. Consequently, all of Eber's descendants were known as עִבְרִי -Ivri (crossers). Thus, Abraham's descendants became known as עִבְרִיִּים -Ivrim, Hebrews, because he too had crossed the river. According to Rashi, they were named Ivrim because they were descended from Eber.

The commentary to Rashi, Mizrahi Genesis 39:14, maintains that only someone who was both a descendant of Eber and had crossed the river, is known as Ivri. Thus, only Isaac, and not Ishmael, is known as an Ivri.

The impact of Shem and Eber on humankind was profound and, according to the Talmud, Megilla 17a, Jacob spent 14 years studying Torah at the Yeshiva of Shem and Eber before joining Laban and his family in Haran.

Two key descendants of Eber were his son פֶּלֶג -Peleg and his son יֶקְטָן -Jokton. The word "peleg," which means to split, confound or confuse, refers to the great purging of the nations that took place in Peleg's days (Genesis 11:7-9), during the period of the Tower of Babel. Some attribute the scheme of building the tower to Peleg himself, which is why the generation is named after him, דּוֹר הַקְּלָקָה , the generation of confounding, confusion and splitting.

Peleg's son, Jokton, also played a central role in the development of humankind. The Radak explains that Peleg named his son Jokton, from the Hebrew word יֶקְטָן , meanings small, because from the time of Peleg's birth, human longevity began to diminish. Because he was born physically smaller than those who preceded him, Jokton's father, Eber, concluded that his son's years would be fewer than previous generations.

Rashi, based on the Midrash, claims that Jokton merited to establish many families because he was humble and frequently belittled himself. The Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 6:6, cited by Rashi, claims that Jokton merited to establish thirteen large families. Jokton, despite being small of stature and who diminished himself, serves as a paradigm of humility to those who are large and imposing.

It could very well be that the name Jokton is the first allusion in the Bible to the ideas of humility and modesty—characteristics that are of enormous importance in Jewish and human values. Noah, as well as Joseph's son Ephraim, and Moses are all considered to have been extraordinarily modest people who profoundly influenced Jewish posterity.

When Abraham, Genesis 23, comes to the children of Het to purchase a grave for his wife, he bows down before the people of the land who call him, Genesis 23:6, אֲבִרָם בְּנֵי הַיִּשְׁרָאֵל, Prince of G-d. Despite being so exalted, Abraham in his great modesty, continues to bow. The Midrash HaGadol (an anonymous 14th century compilation of aggadic midrashim on the Pentateuch), states that because of the two times that Abraham humbled himself before the children of Het, nations of the world would later humble themselves before his descendants, the People of Israel.

The special qualities derived from the descendants of Noah—crossing the river and swimming against the tide, as well as their modesty and humility, have served the Jewish people well over the millennia. The continued practice of these qualities by the Jewish people will undoubtedly serve the people well in the future.

May you be blessed.

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*Rabbi Yissochar Frand*

### *The Primary Offspring of A Person Is Not His Children*

The two thoughts I would like to share this week are from the Maharal in his sefer, Gur Aryeh.

“These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with G-d. And Noah had begotten three sons: Shem, Ham, and Yafes.” [Bereshis 6:9-10]. Rashi is bothered by the glaring question that the pasuk seemingly interrupts the introductory clause “These are the offspring of Noah” (Eleh Toldos Noah) with a description of Noah's character traits and only in the next pasuk does it resume the thought and tell us the names of Noah's three sons. Logically, the list of the names of his children should immediately follow the statement “Eleh Toldos Noah”.

The famous Rashi states: This teaches that the primary offspring (i.e. — creations) of the righteous are good deeds.

If we think about this statement in the context of Noah this is nothing short of mind boggling. If there is one individual in the history of the world his greatest accomplishment are his children, it is in fact Noah. We are all Bnei Noah [descendants of Noah]. We happen to be Jews as well (descendants of Avraham), but Noah populated the entire planet. All the billions and billions of people who walk the face of the earth are here because of one individual — Noah.

We would certainly be tempted to say that the greatest accomplishment of this individual is that humanity populates the planet and the members of humanity are all his offspring! Nevertheless, Chazal say about this person that his primary accomplishment and creation in this world is his good deeds. This is a mind-boggling statement!

Why is that? The Maharal gives two reasons. First, the Maharal says, the reason we say the main accomplishment of the righteous in this world is their good deeds is because they were accomplished by the righteous person alone, whereas their children were created only in partnership with the Almighty. Chazal says that there are three partners in every human being — the father, the mother, and the Ribono shel Olam. The Ribono shel Olam is really the prime partner. That is why the Maharal explains the main accomplishment that a person has on his own in this world are his righteous deeds!

The second reason the Maharal cites is the main idea I wish to share. In his second reason, the Maharal explains that a person's children are something external to him whereas his good deeds become an internal part of him! What does this mean? Rav Yehoshua Hartman who wrote the definitive commentary on the Maharal cross references another of the Maharal's teaching to explain this enigmatic statement. This other teaching he cross references is a very basic and classic teaching of the Maharal.

The Torah says that the first man was called Adam because he was taken from the ground (adamah). The Maharal asks, everything came from the earth, including the animals, yet each animal was given a unique name based on its characteristics. Out of all the creatures, why is it that only man was called “Adam” because he was taken from the “adamah” [the earth]?

The Maharal answers that man is indeed more related to the “adamah” than any other creature. When someone looks at a piece of land, he looks at what that piece of land can produce. In looking at land, we must not just see a barren field, we must see what that field can produce — the corn, the grain, the fruit, the crops — whatever it may be. This time of year when a person goes out just a little past the Yeshiva (Ner Israel) he can see acres and acres of ploughed up corn stalks. What do we see when we look at that ground? The Maharal says, do not look at it merely as “earth.” When we look at it, we should be saying “herein lies sustaining food that can keep the world alive.”

“Adamah” is the quintessential term for potential. The same can be said of man. That is what the Torah means when it says that Adam is called Adam because he was taken from the earth (adamah). True, everything came from the ground, but the concept “adamah” should conjure up in our mind one thing — potential. When we look at a human being, we should look at the individual and look at his potential. When we see a newborn baby, we should not merely think “look how cute it is,” but rather we should think “look at the great potential that lies in this baby!”

It is for this reason, the Maharal says, that Adam was given his name based on the fact that he came from the adamah — because adamah is all about potential. Human beings are all about the potential they can bring forth. That is their greatness.

In his manner, we can understand the statement of Chazal cited by Rashi — the main offspring of the righteous are their good deeds. This is because “good deeds” are what the perpetrator of those good deeds becomes — they become part of him. A person's children are only his offspring. They are external to him. Children are certainly an accomplishment. However, a person's children are not “him”. A person's good deeds, on the other hand, become part of him. A person is defined by what he can accomplish in this world — what he can become. A person's good deeds are the fruition of his potential. They define the true person and trump even the accomplishment of children.

This is a lesson for all of us. We should not satisfy ourselves by saying that we can live vicariously through our children. As important as children are and as important as is the effort we must put in raising them, we are put on this earth for another reason as well — independent of our roles as parents. We must view our primary challenge in life as bringing forth to realization the great potential to do good that the Ribono shel Olam gave us. Fulfilling that potential is the “primary offspring” of a person — namely, his good deeds.

### *Torah Anthropology*

The second Maharal I would like to share is a comment on a very interesting Rashi in this week's parsha.

Rashi remarks on the pasuk, “And he sent forth the raven and it kept going and returning until the drying of the waters from upon the earth.” [Bereshis 8:8] When Noah thought it might be safe to emerge from the Tayva [Ark], he sent out the raven. However, the raven did not fly out in search of dry land as Noah had expected but just circled the Tayva, flying back and forth. Rashi, quoting the Gemara states: “The raven did not go on its mission because it was suspicious [of Noah] with regard to its mate...” [Sanhedrin 108b]. As strange as it seems, the raven was afraid that Noah would take its wife while he was “off the boat” doing his mission!

I once heard a true story about a young man in a Baal Teshuvah Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. His Rebbe came over to him and asked him how things were going. The young man replied “things are going pretty well except that I read a Rashi today that is ridiculous.” Which Rashi was he referring to? It was the above cited Rashi that the raven was afraid Noah would have relations with his wife while he flew away on a mission.

The Rebbe carefully explained to him that such teachings of Chazal have to be understood in the light of the nature of Aggadic literature in general. They are really metaphors. There are messages here. Chazal are trying to teach us here something that has nothing really to do with ravens. It has to do with human beings. As Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes, “the Torah is the anthropology of the Ribono shel Olam — how the Ribono shel Olam understands human beings.”

The Maharal explains the metaphor of this teaching about the raven rejecting Noach’s mission.

Ravens by their nature are obsessed with the relations they have with their mates. They are so obsessed by these relations that this is all ravens think about. Therefore, says the Maharal, since the raven was constantly obsessed with thoughts about having relations with his mate, he projected those same obsessions onto everybody else. He assumed that everybody must be thinking the same thing he was. The Maharal writes that it is very common amongst creatures (man included) to project their own thoughts and shortcomings upon others. There is a popular saying “What Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than it says about Paul.” Think about this statement.

This means that if a person goes through life thinking that everybody is out to get him — besides being somewhat paranoid — it is because he really does have such thoughts about “getting” other people. Individuals really project their life view of how they think and how they act and they are convinced that everybody else thinks and acts like that as well.

Therefore, says the Maharal, since the raven was so obsessed with sexual relations with his mate, in his mind he was convinced that this is what Noach must be thinking about as well. Therefore, he suspected Noach of having intentions towards his mate.

This lesson of Chazal is not trying to teach us so much about ravens as it is about ourselves, about human beings in general. It is teaching us that how we view life and how we view people says a lot about us. If we are negative about people, if we are skeptical of their motives and suspect them of wrong doing and ill-intent then that is really a function of how we view the world. These same thoughts may be the farthest thing in the world from those other people we cynically suspect.

The lesson about the raven is not so much a teaching about birds. It is a teaching about human beings — which is the purpose of the entire Torah. In the words of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch this is “Torah anthropology”.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org  
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## חדשות ערוץ 7

**Who was the first to say "Baruch Hashem?"**

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

That’s how so many conversations commence and sometimes one wants to say to the person ‘well why don’t you really tell me how you are?!’ But actually that’s the whole point because Baruch Hashem means: regardless of whether things are fantastic in our lives or whether we’re enduring deep challenges, we look heavenwards and we say ‘Blessed are You Hashem.’ Because we accept that whatever Hashem does, he does for our good.

Now, who was the very first person who was on record saying Baruch Hashem? It was Noach. In the aftermath of the flood, he declared ‘Baruch

Because we accept that whatever Hashem does, he does for our good. Hashem Elokei shem – Blessed is the Lord God of Shem.’ And who was the second person? It was Eliezer. When he came to Mesopotamia in search of a wife for Isaac, somebody who would be the next matriarch of our people. His test at the well side worked so well, so once Rivkah had offered to provide water for him and for his camels he turned heavenwards and said ‘Baruch Hashem Elokei Adoni Avraham – Blessed is the Lord God of my master Avraham.’ Who was the third person to say Baruch Hashem? It was Yitro, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law. When the two were reunited after the exodus from Egypt, Yitro declared ‘Baruch Hashem Asher Hitzil Etchem

M’Yad Mitzrayim – Blessed is the Lord who has saved you from the hand of Egypt.’

Now what I find fascinating is the fact that these three original ‘Baruch Hashems’ were said not by those who were part of our covenantal relationship with the Almighty; not by members of the Israelite people but rather, by outstanding individuals who were able to notice the power of Hashem, the glory of Hashem, the greatness of Hashem in delivering mankind.

And I think the conclusion for us is clear: if they, Noach Eliezer and Yitro, can exclaim Baruch Hashem, then Kal V’Chomer, how much more so should we, who see the hand of Hashem in our lives at all times, enthusiastically declare Baruch Hashem – blessed is the Lord, thank you Hashem for everything you do for us.

Shabbat shalom.

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

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## The Times of Israel

**The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz**

**Noah: Immortality by 2077**

*I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying. — Woody Allen*

Modern scientists have reached a stage of technological development where they can start to dream of extending man’s life indefinitely. While immortality still remains in the realm of science-fiction, multiple solutions are being worked on that should there be a breakthrough in any one of them, would signify a serious change in man’s longevity. The search for eternal life has often been connected with Messianic dreams.

It has long been taboo in Judaism to predict when the long-awaited Messiah may finally arrive. Maimonides declared it a fundamental principle of Judaism that we need simple belief and faith that the Messiah can arrive any day and to await him expectantly. Not that this has stopped countless Rabbis throughout the generations from giving dates and deadlines (all the past ones clearly erroneous so far) as to when the personification of our redemption will show himself.

Rabbeinu Bechaye does something a little different. In his commentary on Genesis 11:10 he predicts when the Messianic age will end. Back when he wrote his commentary, around the year 1290, he predicted that the Messianic age would end by 2077. And it would end with eternal life, for some.

When the Torah provides the list of generations and descendents of Shem son of Noah, it doesn’t mention their deaths, as opposed to the similar list of descendents of Adam until Noah. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the reason may be because Shem was the ancestor of the Davidic monarchy and the Messiah son of David will not die, but rather will live forever.

He states that after the year 2077 (really, 5837 in the Hebrew calendar) we will enter the seventh millennium which is the Sabbath of the world, and eternal life. He further implies that only those who cleave onto God will merit that eternal life.

For the younger ones among us, they may very well live to test Rabbeinu Bechaye’s prediction 60 years from now. The rest of us need to work on our life extending strategies. All of us need to work on cleaving to God.

May the Messiah show up rapidly in our own days.

Shabbat Shalom,

Dedication - To the staff and volunteers of IsraAID who consistently provide life-saving help in disaster scenes around the world.

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**Drasha - Parshas Noach**

**Ark D'triumph**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

You gotta believe. Day in, day out for 120 years, Noah built an ark. Naysayers and scoffers chided him, mocked him, and continued on their path to self-destruction. But Noah continued to build.

It must have been terribly difficult for Noah. A man alone, predicting calamity. He was the only human doing something to save himself. Yet despite 10 years of outreach and cajoling to curious onlookers to mend their evil ways, he was not able to persuade one member of civilization to join him. Why?

The Torah tells us that when Noah finally entered the ark for the journey of salvation amidst the world's destruction he almost had to be forced. "And Noah entered the ark because of the flood waters" (Genesis 7:7). Rashi explains that even Noah himself was considered one of those with only modest faith. Noah did not enter the ark until the rains fell and he realized that disaster was imminent.

Surely his failing was minute by our standards. After all, Noah was handpicked by G-d Almighty to save and perpetuate civilization. Yet his minor flaw is recorded. There must be a lesson for all of us in the Torah's documentation of it.

British physician John Abernathy, in addition to being a renowned surgeon and teacher in the late 18th Century, helped patients with an array of emotional problems. He once related the story of a patient who entered his clinic complaining of severe bouts of melancholy and depression. It seems that the artisan lost faith in his own abilities. He felt he was not living up to his normal standard. He was beginning to fail at his life's work. After examining him, Dr. Abernathy made a simple suggestion.

"Go see the famous comedian, Grimaldi. He is known to cheer those who are depressed and he would do wonders for your spirit. He will make you laugh and that would be better than any drug I should prescribe."

The patient looked even glummer. "It won't help me," sighed the despondent patient. "I am Grimaldi."

Noah worked extremely hard to build the ark, but he could not rehabilitate one soul. Perhaps the Torah tells us the reason why he was unable to convince anyone to join him.

Noah himself would not enter the ark until the rains forced him in. He did not run to the boat with a battle-cry of unshaken faith. For whatever reason, perhaps he felt that G-d's compassion would ultimately overcome His wrath: still, he did not show clear, unwavering belief that the flood would come.

In order to bring Jews close to Torah, in order to build souls, one must be steeped in the faith so powerfully that he need not be pushed into his own ark of his own salvation. In addition to building it, he must breathe it, live it and be totally committed to it.

One can build great arks, but unless the passion of his faith exudes from his soul, it may never touch others. He may save himself and his family, but no more.

My grandfather, zt"l, once told me that if a certain secular writer would have seen the Chofetz Chaim, he could never have believed that man evolved from a monkey. The Chofetz Chaim's radiance emanated a spirit which thundered the sanctity of his very essence.

In order to promote true faith one must be unwavering in his own commitment. Any lack thereof, albeit well intentioned, may get lost in a large, doubting crowd. For without one's own sense of absolute faith he will never lead others into his own ark d'triumph.

*Good Shabbos!*

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

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