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subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Peleg and Yoktan: Dispersion and Redemption

Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Peleg and Yoktan: Dispersion and Redemption

I

"To Eiver were born two sons. The name of the first was Peleg, because in his days the world was divided. The name of his brother was Yoktan" (Bereishis 10:25). Eiver was a prophet and named his son after a future event, namely the dispersion (haflaga) which took place at the end of his days (Rashi ad loc). Yoktan was humble and made himself small, and merited to have thirteen sons. This, too, was prophesized by Eiver (Rashi, Sifsei Chachomim, ad loc).

Chizkuni cites Bereishis Raba (37:7) saying that the ancients, who possessed ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration) named based on events. He interprets "divided" differently than Rashi and explains that from Peleg and on human longevity was "divided", i.e. halved. Until Peleg, man lived over four hundred years, and afterwards only over two hundred years (See Bereishis 11:10-32).

Seforno adds that the reason lifespans became shorter was the sin of those who built the Tower of Bavel (11:2), which he (11:4-6) identifies as idolatry. He views reduced longevity as a punishment, whose natural cause was the sudden climate change of the dispersion.

II

The Kli Yakar (11:1,6) connects the story of the dispersion to the Mishna (Sanhedrin 71b) which states, "The dispersion of the wicked is good for them and good for the world." If wicked people are gathered in one place, they conspire to hurt others. Moreover, they fight with each other. Each has a different desire (e.g. wealth, honor, food, women). Worse, each wants to rise above the others. This trait affects most Jews as well (B'rabas b'nai ameinu, a play on Devraim 3:11, used by the Kli Yakar (Devarim 2:4) regarding the related habit of ostentation).

The people of the Dor Haflaga initially lived in peace, with one language (11:1). They feared that they would be dispersed and planned to build a city

and a tower to keep them together, as all people like to live in big cities (11:4). The problem with this plan was the phrase "Let us make a name for ourselves".

Hashem realized that since their motive was to make a name for themselves, each person would want to rule over, and be higher than, the others. This would lead to internal wars. The gathering of the wicked is bad for them, as explained above. Hashem said (11:6, a statement, not a question as Rashi interprets), "I will preserve the peace by dispersing them, which is good for them and for the world."

There can never be peace between those who want to make a name for themselves. The people of our nation prove it. How lowly is this trait. It destroyed the Bais Hamikdash twice, and delays the building of the third Bais Hamikdash, until Hashem will remove from our midst those who exult in arrogance. The remaining humble and poor people will take shelter in the Name of Hashem (Tz'fania 3:11,12).

III

The Kli Yakar's powerful conclusion contains a timeless lesson. He associates war and destruction with arrogance, and peace and redemption with humility. Yoktan was humble and blessed with many children, Peleg represents the dispersion that took place when he died. As the opposite of Yoktan he may have been arrogant and childless. The sin of the Dor Haflaga, according to the Kli Yakar, was arrogance, not idolatry as Seforno understands.

According to the Midrash Tanchuma, cited by Rashi (11:1) and Kli Yakar (11:6), they said, "G-d does not have the right to select for Himself alone the higher realms. We will go up to the sky and wage war with Him." This is the epitome of arrogance and heresy.

The Midrash Raba (38:6, cited by Rashi 11:9) asks: Which sin was worse? The generation of the flood, that did not attack G-d, but merely distanced themselves from Him, or the generation of the dispersion, which attacked Him? Clearly the latter. Why, then, was the generation of the flood destroyed while the generation of the dispersion was spared? The Midrash answers: The generation of the flood were thieves and there was hostility between them, and, therefore, they were washed away. The generation of the dispersion behaved with love and friendship among themselves, and, therefore, were spared. Rashi concludes, "we learn that dispute (machlokes) is hated and peace (shalom) is great." The Midrash adds that even if Yisrael worships idols, if there is peace between them Hashem does not punish them, as it states (Hoshea 4:17), "Ephraim is attached [as one group], let him be [even if they are attached to their idols, as per the literal translation]." Furthermore, the evil deeds of the generation of the flood are explicit (Bereishis 6:2,11), while those of the generation of the dispersion are not. Since they sinned only towards Hashem but loved each other, their shameful behavior was not revealed in the Torah (Radal).

A similar contrast is found (Vayikra Raba 26:2) between the generation of Dovid and that of Achav. In Dovid's time, the youth were very learned and righteous. Nevertheless, they fell in battle because of their interpersonal sins. But Achav's idolatrous soldiers were victorious since they behaved properly towards one another.

IV

Unfortunately, inappropriate infighting, even among the very learned and righteous and their adherents, continues until this very day. The Netziv (Meishiv Davar I, 44) attributes the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdash to the baseless hatred (Yoma 9b) of finding minor sins in others and branding them heretics. This led to the bloodshed mistakenly viewed as permitted and even commanded by the Torah. The Netziv bemoans the fact that, in his time, one observant Jew sees another who does not serve Hashem in the same way as he (al pi darko ba'avodas Hashem) and views the other as a heretic. He distances himself from the other, and they pursue (rodfim, i.e. attempt to harm) one another based on false imagination, and all of Hashem's nation can be destroyed, chalila (Heaven forbid).

Our tradition teaches that we are unable to attribute personal tragedy to specific causes with certainty. Nonetheless, ba'alei mussar have quietly noted that some protagonists in bitter disputes within yeshivos two generations ago, even very learned and righteous, suffered from early morbidity, mortality or childlessness.

When the Ramban reported his findings in Eretz Yisrael, he wrote that the holier the place, the more destroyed it was (kol hamekudash mechaveiro charev mechavero). The same can, unfortunately, be said of destructive disputes within some legendary Torah institutions and movements in the Holy Land today. In America, unfortunately, bitter and acrimonious disputes continue within major Chassidic sects.

The certainty that one's way serving of Hashem is the only legitimate one, bemoaned by the Netziv, continues to plague us. The arrogance of the Dor Haflaga, linked by Rashi to Peleg, must be avoided. As the Kli Yakar taught, the desire to raise oneself at the expense of others caused the churban and delays the ge'ula. Only by emulating the humility of Yoktan can we be blessed personally with successful families and hasten our long-awaited national redemption.

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More divrei Torah on Parshas Noach

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Oct 11, 2018, 6:40 PM

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Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Noach

The Importance of Hope & the Strength of Willpower

Rav Meir Shapiro Analyzes the Symbolism of the Rainbow

Following the Mabul [Great Flood], Hashem gave a sign that He would never again flood the entire world. That sign, as we all know, is the rainbow. Rav Meir Shapiro, z"l, gives a beautiful comment as to why specifically the rainbow was made the Heavenly sign that the Ribono shel Olam would never again destroy the world with water.

Rav Meir Shapiro comments on a question that many people ask. It took Noach 120 years to build the Teiyva [Ark]. During that entire period, he apparently did not have an effect on anyone in his entire generation. The only people that were saved were his immediate family. He had an extremely unsuccessful career as a "kiruv worker." After 120 years, for not even one person to become a believer in the Almighty and the principles of universal morality is a dismal career in "outreach."

Many commentaries take note of this and try to explain why this was the case – particularly in terms of trying to reconcile that with the Torah's description of Noach as "Tzadik, Tamim" [righteous and perfect]. Such people usually do have an impact on their generation.

Rav Shapiro speculates as to why in fact Noach was not successful. He suggests that Noach believed that the people of his generation were beyond salvation. He had no faith in the people and felt that they sank to such a low level of spiritual darkness that there was no hope for them. In any endeavor, a person must believe in what he is doing and believe in his ability to have an effect. If, in his heart of hearts, a person does not believe that he can have an effect, then he cannot make the case. For this reason, Noach was never successful in bringing anyone "under the wings of the Shechina."

Rav Shapiro says that with this hypothesis, we can understand why the Divine sign that the world would never again be totally destroyed by flood was the rainbow. As we all know, a rainbow occurs when there is a beautiful day and suddenly it becomes terribly cloudy and terribly dark. There follows a downpour, and shortly after the downpour, the clouds dissipate. It becomes light again, it becomes bright again, and when the sun hits the rain, a

rainbow is formed, which is a beautiful multi-colored illumination in the heaven. The message of the rainbow is that no matter how dark the world may be, after the darkness, the light can shine and can in fact make a beautiful image that brightens the world.

This was the pointed message to Noach: Your assessment of your generation — that they are living in such darkness that light cannot help — is wrong. The rainbow is a metaphor which teaches that this is not necessarily the way things work. The message to Noach was to never give up on people. No one is beyond redemption. Every single neshama is pure at its base. There is a "pintele Yid" or a "pintele of spirituality" in every single person. As a result of that, there is hope for seeing the light of the rainbow at the end of the period of darkness.

The Lesson of Migdal Bavel

We all know the story of the Migdal Bavel [Tower of Babel]. There were people that wanted to do battle with Hashem. They built a tower in order to "strategically position themselves to fight the Almighty." The Ribono shel Olam descended and He introduced different languages so that the people were not able to communicate with one another. Therefore, their plans fell by the wayside.

In every incident in Sefer Bereshis, in fact, in every incident in the Torah, there needs to be a lesson for us. What is the lesson of the story of Migdal Bavel? What is the Torah trying to teach us? Obviously, it is something more than just "we should not contemplate doing battle with Hashem."

I saw an approach to this question in a sefer by Rav Chaim Friedlander (Sifsei Chaim). He explains that the story contains a lesson that is crucial for all human beings to know. The pasuk states in Parshas Bereishis, "And G-d said, 'Let us make man, in Our image, in Our likeness.'" [Bereishis 1:26] The Seforno (as well as other classic Biblical commentaries) says that the import of man being created "in the Image of G-d" is that every person has certain qualities that exist in the Almighty. Human beings possess these same qualities. We possess character traits and strengths that the Ribono shel Olam Himself possesses.

One of the traits of the Almighty is something called Ratzon [Will]. When Hashem Wills something, it becomes a reality. Baruch she'amar v'haya ha'Olam [Blessed is He who spoke and the world came into existence]. All the Almighty needed to do was to Will that the world come into existence and so it did. Hashem has that amazing infinite power that by merely Willing something, it happens.

Obviously, human beings do not have this power of Willing to that extent. But nevertheless, this concept of Ratzon – of human desire — the ability to will something and want something is a powerful force even among human beings. The fact that people Want something can create a reality.

In fact, the Maharal says a very interesting idea in a totally different context. There is a halacha called "Eidim Zomemim." Two people come into Beis Din. They falsely testify that Reuven killed Shimon. They go through a process called "hazamah" and the result is that for wanting to kill Reuven by testifying that he is deserving of the death penalty, we put the witnesses to death! How does this work?

The Maharal explains a fantastic concept. The fact that these witnesses WANTED someone to die, created a reality in this world, and therefore that WILL for someone to die does not dissipate. In fact, this reality boomerangs and comes back to attack them. Such is the power of human will. But the question must be asked, if the fact that I want something is so strong that it can create reality (we are G-d-like in that sense and just like G-d Wills something it becomes something, so too by man), why is it that when we want something, it does not automatically become a reality?

The Ponnevizzer Rav asked the Chofetz Chaim this question. The Chofetz Chaim responded that it is because our wants do not have a laser-like focus. I want to become the biggest talmid chochom in the United States of America... but I have not achieved that because I also want to sleep at night. I also want to read the newspaper and I also want to relax. Although I WANT to become the biggest talmid chochom, I want to do other things as

well. Therefore, my ratzon [desire] is not focused, I have competing desires as well.

People who are in business typically want to become fantastically wealthy. They may want to become Bill Gates or “the Sage of Omaha” who is worth 40 billion dollars. I WANT IT, they insist. So why are we not all billionaires? The answer is because we all want other things as well. To become fantastically wealthy like that, a person can have no other ratzon. There can be no other desire in a person’s life.

For this reason, our desires do not create the realities that they could potentially create.

We all want to be bnei Olam HaBah – we all want to acquire this promised portion of the World-to-Come. However, in the meantime, we all want Olam HaZeh [this world] as well. Given that acquiring Olam HaZeh often conflicts with acquiring Olam HaBah, it does not happen as well as it could. If, in fact, we could have pure, unadulterated, undissipated and focused ratzon – there is nothing that could stand in our way. It would just need to happen. This is a quality that human beings have that is just like the Ribono shel Olam. We are “in the Image” of He who is Blessed and Spoke so that the world came into existence (Baruch she’Amar v’haya ha’Olam).

The Ponnevizher Rav cited a Medrash to buttress this point. The Medrash gives the following parable: There was a man who became a drunk. He loved drinking so much that he began selling all the furniture in his house to pay for his habit. His children said to themselves: “We are going to be left with nothing. We need to bring our father back to reality.” They took their father when he was stone drunk and dragged him to a cemetery. In his drunken stupor, he fell asleep there and they left him there. They figured he would wake up and look around and see that he was in the cemetery. He would panic and say “Oy vey! Look what happened to me!” The hope was that this would put the fear of G-d into him and he would give up drinking.

The Medrash continues that there were wine merchants who were coming to the city and there was also an army that invaded the city. The wine merchants were afraid to come into the city for fear that the soldiers would confiscate all their wine. They decided to hide the wine in the cemetery and enter the city without their merchandise. The fellow woke up from his drunken stupor. He looked to his right and saw a large barrel of wine. He was thrilled and began drinking all over again. The kids came back to the cemetery the next day, expecting to see their father all ashen white, shaken, having the fear of G-d in him. What do they find? He is sitting next to an empty barrel of wine, drunker than when they left him.

The kids came to the conclusion: This is our father’s ratzon (primary will in life), and the Almighty is making it happen! Because when a person wants something so badly, we see that even the Ribono shel Olam becomes a partner in helping carry out man’s will!

Unfortunately, we see the same thing, may Heaven save us, when people are addicted to drugs. Nothing stands in their way. They will sell everything including themselves just to be able to keep their habit going. Because their WILL is so strong that nothing will stand in their way, to such an extent that even the Almighty will be a partner in making that happen.

We see this quality called Ratzon in the story of Migdal Bavel. What does the Torah say? The Almighty descends and He says that these people want to make a fight with Me. They have this strong desire and they have begun to build their tower. “And now, it will not be withheld from them all they propose to do.” [Bereshis 11:6]. Hashem Himself testifies: They are going to make it happen! It as if He is saying, “I can’t stand in their way. There is nothing I can do.” Why? Because when you get together an entire society of people united with one desire, nothing can stand in their way.

Many times, the reason my desire does not necessarily lead to what I am hoping for is because somebody else wants something else which conflicts with my desire. However, if everybody is on board, everybody wants the same thing, everybody has a passion that points in the same direction... then the Ribono shel Olam says “What am I going to do? I can’t stand in their way!”

However, the Almighty said that there is one thing He could do to stop them – that is to break up their unity. If I break their unity, their greatest power will be removed from them. What did the Almighty do? He descended amongst them and created 70 languages. This guy wants bricks and his friend gives him mortar, this guy wants mortar and his friend gives him bricks. They start fighting with each other. The unity is broken. Once the unity is broken, the Ratzon is broken and therefore they cannot complete the project.

The lesson of the story of Migdal Bavel is what Chazal tell us – Ayn davar ha’omed bifnei haRatzon –Nothing can stand in the way of human desire. Ay – we see it is not true; many times we do not get what we want? That is because our Ratzon is not strong enough.

We can look at athletes who train for the Olympics. They train for hours and hours and hours. Look at the native Baltimorean Michael Phelps (swimmer; most decorated Olympian of all time with 28 medals including 8 Gold Medals in the 2008 Beijing games). Do you know how many hours a day this fellow spent practicing for the Olympics? It was 10 or 12 hours a day. The guy had no life. His entire life was swimming. Your entire life is swimming? That is all you want out of life? Nothing stands in the way of a person’s will! Many people want to become great Olympic swimmers. Many people want to become great talmidei chachomim. Many want to be very wealthy. We all want many very nice things, but the problem is we want other things as well. Our “Will” is diluted; therefore our “Will” is not decisive.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD

dhoffman@torah.org

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Noach

פרשת נח תשעט

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו

These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous person, perfect in his generations. (6:9)

The term *toldos*, offspring, can also refer to spiritual offspring, the progeny one creates via mentoring them. One’s horizon is not limited to his personal circle. True, one’s greatest impact is on those within his environs, within his grasp, but, through the medium of teaching Torah, one’s reach far extends his grasp. This lesson is taught by *Rashi* in his commentary to *Bamidbar* 3:1, “These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe.” The Torah, however, goes on to list only the sons of Aharon. What happened to the sons of Moshe *Rabbeinu*? *Rashi* quotes the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 19b, from which *Chazal* infer that one who is the spiritual mentor, ie, teaches Torah, to his friend’s children is considered as if he had begotten them. A spiritual mentor becomes a spiritual father. Since Moshe taught Torah to the sons of his brother, Aharon *HaKohen*, he became their spiritual father on much the same plane that Aharon was their biological father.

We return to consider Noach, who certainly studied Torah, as noted by *Rashi* (7:2). Noach was a spiritually self-made man, having been his own student. *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, interprets this idea into the *pasuk*, *Eileh Toldos Noach* – Noach; “These are the offspring’s of Noach – Noach.” Since Noach taught himself Torah, his offspring was actually himself! Noach begot Noach. Perhaps we can extend this idea a bit further by suggesting that when one studies Torah, he is recreating himself. Every moment of Torah learning is a moment of spiritual transformation.

Rav Karlinstein quotes the *Chasam Sofer*, who offers the following insightful explanation of “Noach – Noach.” During the last fifty-eight years of Noach’s life, he merited to live together with Avraham *Avinu*. It was a period of unparalleled spiritual ascendance, to see and be inspired by the Patriarch of our People. It was those fifty-eight years which earned Noach the appellation *tzaddik tamim*, righteous/perfect. Avraham was called *tamim* by Hashem. Being in his presence allowed this “perfection” to be transmitted to Noach. Thus, *Eileh toldos Noach – Noach*. The prime years of Noach were “Noach” – his last fifty-eight years (*gematria*, numerical equivalent, of Noach is 58), during which he was inspired by – and absorbed – the teachings of Avraham.

נה איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו

Noach was a righteous person, perfect in his generations. (6:9)

One of the more well-known debates among *Chazal* concerns the nature of Noach’s righteousness: Was it the real thing, or was it relative to the evildoers of his generation? Some sages maintain that it is in his praise: Noach was righteous even in his generation, which was corrupt. How much more so would he have been righteous in the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, which did not suffer from such an ignominious population? Others feel that *b’dorasav*, in his generations, is a critique of Noach, suggesting that only in his generation, which was extremely wicked, could he have earned such a righteous reputation.

In any event, Noach’s reputation has always been questioned. Was he, or was he not, a *tzaddik*? *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*, understands this debate more positively. First and foremost, Noach was a righteous person. That is indisputable. The issue (as he sees it) is: Which generation presented a greater test, a more difficult hardship, toward maintaining his righteousness?

Those who interpret *b’dorasav* as praise feel that to achieve the spiritual plateau of righteousness in a generation of evil is a greater challenge. Indeed, had he lived during Avraham’s tenure, he would have benefited from the Patriarch’s inspiration, in addition to having to contend with a generation that was simply ignorant – not corrupt. In Avraham’s generation, Noach would have fared better, but his righteousness was never impugned.

Those who view *b’dorasav* negatively feel that when one’s surroundings are replete with individuals whose lives are filled with corruption, thievery, slander, disloyalty to one another and to one’s spouse, it is understandable that any decent human being would be repulsed by such decadent behavior. Viewing the evil of others is what spurred Noach to a life of righteousness. Had he otherwise lived during the generation of Avraham, it is no indication that he would have chosen a life of the spirit. One thing is for certain: Everyone is in agreement that Noach was a *tzaddik*. The issue is only concerning his motivation to climb the ladder of spirituality and the challenges that confronted him on his ascent to spiritual distinction.

נה איש צדיק

Noach was a righteous person. (6:9)

Noach’s reputation as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, appears solid. He stood alone against a generation that had transformed corruption into a culture, a society that embraced and embodied decadence. One man against a world. This was Noach. He was compelled to live alone because, otherwise, the evil influence would have overpowered him. An individual who possesses such strength of character was worthy of being spared during the great Flood that engulfed the world. Eventually, it was Noach who was charged with rebuilding the world.

Despite Noach’s personal distinction, the waters of the Flood are called *mei Noach*, waters of Noach, as if he is being blamed for the disaster of the Flood. Why is this? How is Noach, on the one hand, called a *tzaddik*, and, on the other hand, he is excoriated and held responsible for the Flood? The *Zohar HaKadosh* explains that Noach’s personal distinction notwithstanding, at the end of the day he did not petition Hashem on behalf

of the people of his generation, to show mercy and spare them from extinction.

It is not as if Noach sat around doing nothing for 120 years. He built a massive ark, hoping that people would take notice and question him about why he was doing this. Once he was able to engage them in conversation, he would inform them of the impending catastrophe that was going to destroy them. Perhaps, they would listen and repent. They did neither. Avraham *Avinu* took a different approach with regard to *kiruv*, outreach. He reached out by leaving the comfort zone of his environment and traveling around engaging people in conversation, thereby calling out in the Name of Hashem. The difference between Noach and Avraham is essentially their varied approaches to *kiruv*. Noach waited for people to come to him. Avraham went out and searched for opportunities to reach out to people.

In his *Messages From Rav Pam*, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s observation of our generation as being quite like the *Dor HaMabul*, generation of the Flood. Veritably, we all lead an insular lifestyle. We are (for the most part) protected from the harsh, impure environment, with its corruption, moral turpitude and lack of respect for anything spiritual. Do we think only of ourselves and our families, or do we feel a sense of *achrayos*, responsibility, for our fellow Jews who are literally drowning in a sea of confusion, ravaged by the waves of atheism and decadence? I am not even mentioning the addictions to the base media and drugs, which, in all reality, should be considered weapons of mass destruction. Our people – from all walks of life – are succumbing to the spiritual onslaught on their physical and spiritual lives; yet we (for the most part) sit comfortably sheltered and protected from the deluge that is daily taking its terrible toll.

Rav Pam recalled an incident to which he was privy during his hospitalization for an illness. His roommate was a young non-practicing Jewish man, who had been critically injured in an automobile accident. For a while, he was in a coma. Afterwards, the road to recovery was long and difficult. The accident had taken its toll on his internal organs, which would take some time to heal. His wife was very supportive, hardly ever leaving his bedside, other than to go home to change. She would sit by him all day, offering words of encouragement to imbue him with a will to live. His body had been so utterly devastated, he was prone to bouts of depression and despair. *Rav Pam* noticed that she would not eat when she visited her husband – even during meal times. He asked her why she did not eat. If she were to maintain her rigid schedule of helping her husband to recover, she would need physical stamina. By not eating, she was sabotaging her goal. Her reply was inspiring, “My husband cannot eat due to his severe internal injuries. How can I eat in front of him?”

What incredible sensitivity! (This, in and of itself, is worthy of a paper.) The *Rosh Yeshivah* said that these simple words, spoken from the heart of a *Yiddishe neshamah*, made a profound impression on him. How can we, Torah Jews, “eat” i.e. live a comfortable, fulfilling, inspirational Torah life, knowing that the majority of our people are unable to “eat” and will probably never have the opportunity to enjoy such a meaningful life, because most of them have never had a chance? They were never exposed – either purposefully, maliciously, or due to fear and ignorance – to wholesome Torah living. Therefore, we should not repeat the error for which the *Zohar HaKadosh* criticizes Noach. We should do our utmost to bring our fellow Jews closer to a life of the spirit – a life replete with Torah and *mitzvos*.

I would like to take this a bit further. Many of us are in communities that are home to numerous *baalei teshuvah*, individuals, young folk, men and women and families, who, after being exposed to a Torah life, have broken with their past. Many have been ostracized by their families for their decision to become observant. It was a powerful and compelling life-altering decision to make. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to enjoy the same Torah *nachas* that *frum*-from-birth families enjoy. I will never forget attending a wedding of a friend’s daughter, someone who had done well, raised a beautiful Torah family and was reaping the *nachas* that comes with this way of life. I stood there during the dancing with another friend – a *baal*

teshuvah, who embraced a Torah-observant lifestyle later in life. We were both looking at our mutual friend dancing with his sons and sons-in-law, and he remarked to me, somewhat sadly, “I guess that is one part of Orthodoxy I will never experience.” I did not know what to say, but I came to realize that we must be sensitive to the tug at the heart which they experience when they hear of and see our *nachas*. To show off our albums, pictures of our grandchildren, to relate about our family *simchas*, joyous occasions, is like eating in front of a person whose internal organs have been damaged. This idea obviously applies to all situations in which we are with someone who does not have what we have, such as: telling our economically – challenged friends about our trip to Europe, etc; sharing pictures of our milestone occasions with those who have yet to experience such milestones; speaking of weddings to the young man or woman who has yet to find his/her *bashert*; sharing our children’s milestones with the young who has yet to be blessed with their first child; showing pictures of our grandchildren to parents who have yet to make their first wedding. The list sadly continues, but, I think (I hope), the reader understands what I mean.

קנים תעשה את התבה

Make the Ark with compartments. (6:14)

The simple explanation of this *pasuk* is that the Ark was built with various compartments to house its many “travelers.” *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:9) interpret *kinnim* as being derived from *ken*, a nest, referring to the birds which are offered by the *metzora*, spiritual leper, as penance for the sins that catalyzed the contraction of his disease. They comment, “As the *ken metzora* purifies the leper, so, too, does the *Teivah*, Ark, purify its passengers.” This is a reference to its human cargo, Noach and his family. *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, explains that the purification of the *Teivah* refers to its serving as a place of refuge for its passengers. Noach and his family were spared from harm as a result of the protection provided by the *Teivah*. Obviously, it was not the actual Ark that saved them, but the merit of their being there and what they did during their entire trip that served as a *z’chus*, merit, on their behalf. What was this *z’chus*?

The *Midrash* teaches that Avraham *Avinu* asked Malki Tzedek (Shem) what merit did his family have to survive the raging waters of the Flood? Malki Tzedek replied that it was the result of their considerable acts of *chesed* in feeding the many animals. They could not sleep, because the feeding schedule of each individual animal varied. They suffered greatly in order to carry out their wonderful acts of *chesed*. *Chazal* conclude that when Avraham heard of the wonderful reward one garners for carrying out acts of *chesed*, kindness, he conjectured to himself, “If this is the reward that one receives from performing *chesed* with animals, how much more so will one receive for acts of human kindness?” This inspired him to open up his famous *eishal*, rest stop, to provide sustenance to travelers.

Horav Dov Yoffe, zl (spoken during his *hesped*, eulogy, for the *Slabodka Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Mordechai Shulman, zl*), observed that *Klal Yisrael* is noted for its commitment to the *middah* of *chesed*, attribute of loving-kindness. We exemplify the performance of acts of kindness. It is part of our DNA, heralding back to our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, the *Amud HaChesed*, Pillar of Kindness. Avraham derived its importance from Noach, who, together with his family, devoted themselves 24/7 to the care and maintenance of all the creatures traveling on the Ark. In other words, Avraham reached the pinnacle of human perfection due to his outstanding performance of – and commitment to – each and every *middah*, attribute/character trait. Every succeeding generation looks to him as the symbol of greatness, whom we should emulate and follow. The absolute crown of his work in *middos tovos*, positive character traits, was *middas hachessed*, performance of acts of kindness, which he inferred from Noach’s devotion to the animals. That is where it all comes from – understanding that kindness is not simply something that we do; it is a part of our psyche. We are inherently kind. [Thus, there is no difference between human being and creature.] We are kind. We do not distinguish between creations.

A well-known incident that took place during the Holocaust demonstrates the innate sense of kindness possessed by Jews – towards all creatures. As the Slovakian farmer, victim of the Nazi terror, Yitzchak Rosenberg, was being herded into the cattle cars enroute to Auschwitz, he cried out to his neighbors, “But who will attend to my chickens?” Kindness courses through Jewish veins, the result of the Patriarchal bequest from Avraham.

We should, however, never forget that as critical as the *middah* of *chesed* is, it begins at home. A person who is constantly reaching out to others at the expense of his home/family is not a *baal chesed* – he is an *achzar*, cruel person! *Horav Simchah Cohen, Shlita*, spoke before a traditional/modern audience in a secular *kibbutz*, extolling to them the outstanding acts of *chesed* performed by the *chareidi* Jews of Bnei Brak. He related the many *gmachs* that are run by devoted men and women who leave their comfort zones to help the Jews of their community.

The *Rav* went on to describe the extraordinary acts of *chesed* performed by a specific couple. The man is far from rich, but he is deeply committed to, and generous in, responding to the needs of a certain family. It has been going on twelve years that he apportions most of his weekly paycheck to sustain them. The story does not end there. The man’s wife is not to be overlooked in her acts of *chesed*. Her acts of *chesed* are not monetary, but physical. She also helps out in that man’s home. Apparently, the mother in that family is very weak and sickly.

Our heroine rises early every day, wakes up the woman’s children and sees to it that they are properly dressed for school. She then provides them with sandwiches and drives them to school. At the end of the school day, she is there to pick them up, take them home, where she has snacks waiting for them. She does homework with them before giving them supper and getting them ready for bed. During the day, she even cleans up the house, so that at night they will come home to a clean home. This is carried out day in and day out.

As soon as *Rav Cohen* concluded his speech, one of the listeners rose up and said, “*Kavod Horav*, I do not believe this story. I understand that you want to demonstrate the wonderful acts of kindness performed by the religious community of Bnei Brak, but this is ludicrous! Nobody acts in this manner. They have to have a life!”

Rav Cohen countered, “If I give you their names and the address of their home, will you then believe me? You want to know who this wonderful generous man is, and the name of his extraordinary wife? It is you and your wife! Do you not spend your paycheck for the needs of your family? Does your wife not do all of these wonderful acts of kindness for your children? Do you think that this is not *chesed*? My dear friend – *chesed* begins at home! Everything that you do is a *mitzvah*. It is *chesed*!”

I would like to add that the husband and wife who do not take their familial responsibilities seriously – or worse, those who unintentionally, due to their many other obligations, neglect their families – are transgressing *mitzvos*. Their children are no less important than the children of others – whom they claim to be helping. The following story underscores this idea.

One of the *avreichim, kollel* fellows, in Yerushalayim was rushing one early morning to *kollel*. His *chavrusa*, study partner, was waiting for him, and he did not want to be late. As he hurried down the street, he noticed a woman in front of him walking very slowly, because she was carrying two heavy shopping bags filled with groceries. The poor woman was trudging along, weighed down by the weight of these bags. He was behind her, so he was unable to see her face. It was also not yet light outside.

He felt bad for this woman, but what should he do? He did not want to be late for *kollel*. On the other hand, what kind of person allows a woman to *shlep* such heavy bags without offering his assistance? But then, he is a G-d-fearing *ben Torah*; there is the idea of *tznius*, moral modesty. After all, this is a strange woman. He really should not be looking at or conversing with her. But to walk by her and not help is pure cruelty. So, as a true *ben Torah*, he bent down his head and offered to carry the bags.

The woman was just as devout as he. She said *today*, thank you, placed the bags on the ground for him. He asked, “Where shall I take them?” (He was not prepared to walk down the street with her.) She did not reply. He asked again, “*Giveret*, where should I deliver these bags?” The woman looked up at him and asked, “Moshe, what is with you? Do you no longer recognize your wife?” He took one look, realized that it was his wife, and said, “Malkah, I did not know it was you. Listen, I am late for *kollel*. I must rush. I will see you later.” He left the bags on the ground and departed!

I will allow the reading audience to digest the story (which is true) and to ask themselves: “Have I ever been guilty of such insensitive, narcissistic behavior?” We are quick to help others, but often forget that *chesed* begins at home. The child you save might be your own; the family you assist might be your own; the marriage you save might be your own.

In loving memory of our dear husband, Abba and Zeidy, on his yartzheit Mr. Zev Aryeh Solomon - נפטר ה' חשון ת.ג.צ.ב.ה. ר' זאב ארי' ז"ר יעקב שמואל ז"ל - Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
NOACH

The opening sections of the Torah with which we are currently engaged in studying, deal with one of the central problems of human existence and that is the ability to cope with tragedy, disappointment and frustration. The adjustment of human beings to being driven out of the Garden of Eden is really the entire story of human civilization and of its very bleak moments. This week we read of the difficulty of Noach and his descendants to cope with the tragedy that they witnessed when the great flood destroyed the Mesopotamian human civilization. There were different reactions to what they had witnessed and experienced. Noach himself forsook much of his spiritual greatness and accomplishment to become a person of the earth, traumatized by the experiences of the past.

The English expression for this type of attitude is that one attempts to drown his sorrows away. As is recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, this attitude and behavior leads to disaster and complete family dysfunction. The opportunity for resilience, and family and national rebuilding is lost and squandered.

There is a strong inclination within each of us to be overwhelmed by challenging circumstances and tragedies. It is not easy to put one's life back together after witnessing an event such as the great flood. Yet, this is exactly what the rabbis pointed out to us as the major difference between Noach and Abraham. Tested ten times, Abraham's resilience never wanes, and he continues to look forward towards accomplishment.

This week's Torah reading indicates another reaction to tragedy with rebellion and an abandonment of principles, beliefs and faith. The generations after the flood, in their anger and despondency over the punishment that Heaven meted out to human kind, rebelled against God and morality by building of the tower of Babel. They knew of God and they knew of the flood, but they rebelled as a sign of their displeasure with what human kind suffered at the hands of Heaven.

It is historically accurate to say that after great wars and tragedies, decades of decadence and immorality suffuse human society. It is this rebellion against what experience should have taught them that leads to further disaster. It is a different symptom of the same malady, the lack of resilience which often engulfs entire societies and, as history has proven, eventually leads to their demise and disappearance.

This description of human behavior as outlined above, is of enormous instruction to us in our time. We are still the generation reminiscent of the sword raised to destroy the Jewish people and endanger the existence of the Jewish national state. Only by our resilience and tenacity in following the lead of our father Abraham are we guaranteed to have overcome the challenges that face us.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU
www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha

A Drama in Four Acts (Noach 5779)
Covenant & Conversation. Judaism & Torah
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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

The first story is about Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit. Once they have eaten, and discovered shame, God asks them what they have done: And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The third is the story of Noah. Noah is introduced with great expectations: “He will comfort us” (5:29), says his father Lamech, giving him his name. This is the one to redeem man's failure, to offer comfort for “the earth which God cursed.” Yet though Noah is a righteous man, he is not a hero. Noah does not save humanity. He saves only himself, his family and the animals he takes with him in the ark. The Zohar contrasts him unfavourably with Moses: Moses prayed for his generation, Noah did not. In the end, his failure to take responsibility for others diminishes him as well: in the last scene we see him drunk and exposed in his tent. In the words of the Midrash, “he profaned himself and became profaned.”[2] One cannot be a sole survivor and still survive. *Sauve-qui-peut* (“let everyone who can, save himself”) is not a

principle of Judaism. We have to do what we can to save others, not just ourselves. Noah failed the test of collective responsibility. The fourth is the enigmatic story of the Tower of Babel. The sin of its builders is unclear, but is indicated by two key words in the text. The story is framed, beginning and end, with the phrase kol ha'aretz, "the whole earth" (11:1, 8). In between, there is a series of similar sounding words: sham (there), shem (name), and shamayim (heaven). The story of Babel is a drama about the two key words of the first sentence of the Torah: "In the beginning God created heaven (shamayim) and earth (aretz)" (1:1). Heaven is the domain of God; earth is the domain of man. By attempting to build a tower that would "reach heaven," the builders of Babel were men trying to be like gods.

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Mordechai Tzion toratravaviner@yahoo.com
to: ravaviner@yahoo.com
http://www.ravaviner.com/

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim
From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva
Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:
Traveling to Rebbe Nachman's Grave in Uman Q: Is traveling to Uman good or bad?

A: In general, it is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael, except in the case of a Mitzvah. Visiting Kivrei Tzadikim (the graves of the righteous) is not defined as a Mitzvah, but as a positive act. Are there no graves to visit in Eretz Yisrael? Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah are greater than Rebbe Nachman (Shut Orach Mishpat #147).

Helping Others Repent Q: How can we awaken others to repent?

A: Before we help others repent, we ourselves must repent, and increase our proper character traits. This itself will increase the sanctification of Hashem's Name, as explained at the end of Gemara Yoma and in the Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei Torah, end of chap. 5.

TV Q: Should one have a TV?

A: It is doubly damaging. 1. Content: lowly, surface, Lashon Ha-Ra, insults, violence, immodesty, etc. 2. Form: passive, lacking thought and depth, and intellectually damaging, on account of becoming accustomed to what one absorbs.

Yehoshua and Amalek Q: Why didn't Yehoshua command Am Yisrael to destroy Amalek?

A: Either because he was not considered a king or it was not possible.

Sandek or Helping Mother Q: I was asked to serve as the Sandek at a Brit Milah, but my mother asked me to help her with something at the same time. Which is preferable?

A: Certainly honoring your mother. The Pele Yoetz already wrote in distress about people who dole out much money to open the Ark in Shul or to serve as a Sandek – acts which are not Mitzvot from the Torah or from the Rabbis, but express one's love of the Mitzvot. Honoring one's parent is a great Mitzvah from the Torah.. Section on "Kibud Av Ve-Em".

Honoring Grandparents Q: Is honoring one's grandparents like honoring one's parents?

A: It is less, but still a great Mitzvah (Rama, Yoreh Deah 240:24)..

Anti-Semitism Q: Why do people hate Jews? What did we do?

A: It is hatred of Hashem which falls on us. Igeret Teiman of the Rambam. Kashrut of Chickens in Tiveria Q: It is true that the Kashrut of the chickens from Tiveria under the supervision of Ha-Rav Avraham Dov Auerbach is problematic?

A: It is not true. He is a great Torah scholar and a Tzadik. It is forbidden to believe such things. In general, slandering of this kind is on account of competition relating to halachic strictures or business. One must be extremely cautious against believing

Lashon Ha-Ra. Q: But Ha-Rav Auerbach himself does not eat this chicken.

A: This is a lie. He does eat it. By the way, it is permissible for a Rabbi to give Kosher certification that allows everyone to eat something, but to be strict on himself and not eat it. But this is not the case here.

Ritalin Q: I have serious problems of concentration. It is worthwhile to take Ritalin?

A: Yes. It helps a lot. But obviously only after a recommendation from a doctor.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Psalm 63: Two Songs for Two Worlds

Rav Kook Torah

What motivates a person to live a life of Torah?

Some people are drawn to Torah for pragmatic reasons. They seek a more balanced lifestyle, stronger family ties, a warmer community, a kinder society.

Others are motivated by spiritual aspirations. They seek a life of holiness and meaning; they strive for greater closeness to God.

Which path is preferable?

Shema and Prayer

Rabbi Elazar taught that Psalm 63 alludes to both paths:

"פִּי-כֶּן אֶבְרַךְךָ בְּחַיִּי, בְּשִׂמְחָה אֲשָׂא כִפְי... וְשִׂפְתַי רִנְנוֹת ה'לֵל" (ג"ס מיליהת)

"So I will bless You in my life. In Your name, I will lift up my hands... My mouth will give praise with songs of joy." (Psalms 63:5-6)

“Rabbi Elazar said: What does this mean?

“I will bless You in my life” - this refers to reciting the Shema.

“In Your name, I will lift up my hands” - this refers to prayer.

And those who do this... will inherit two worlds, this world and the next world. As it says, “My mouth will give praise with songs of joy.” [The verse speaks of two songs - one in this world, and one in the next.]” (Berachot 16b).

In what way is this verse connected to Shema and prayer? And what does it mean to “inherit two worlds”?

A Life that Blesses God

If we examine the verses of the Shema, we see that they speak of a better life in this world. If we follow the Torah’s teachings, we will merit a good life, rains of blessing, and plentiful crops. And if not, we will suffer hardship and exile.

Rabbi Elazar taught that the Shema corresponds to the phrase, “I will bless You in my life.” When we are guided by a higher goal, when our actions reflect the Torah’s demands for morality and rectitude, then our lives in this world bless God. “In my life, I will bless God.” This is the fundamental message of Shema: accepting the Torah’s authority and living our lives according to its ethical teachings.

However, we should also strive for a higher aspirations, beyond improving the physical world. We should also reach out for spiritual goals. That is the realm of tefillah and prayer.

Higher Aspirations

In prayer, we aspire to goals that go beyond repairing this world. When we pray, we stand straight like the angels. We beseech God for spiritual gifts: enlightenment and redemption, the return of the Shechinah, the means to discover our spiritual path.

We gain awareness of the priceless nature of life when it matches ratzon Hashem, God’s Divine Will that supersedes all other goals and aspirations. Our actions acquire a deeper significance when we recognize the greatness of their purpose.

This is how Rabbi Elazar understood the second half of the verse. “In Your name” - when I internalize a deeper awareness of God’s Name and Will - “I will lift up my hands.” My hands, my strength and power, are uplifted. This outlook awakens a greater appreciation for life, as our lives are elevated beyond the concerns of the physical world.

Inheriting Two Worlds

If we can absorb the inner content of both Shema and prayer, so that God’s Will gives direction to both our physical lives and our higher aspirations, then our service of God will be transformed into one of joy and meaning. It will no longer be necessary to subdue our physical inclinations. “As with the richest foods, my soul will be sated” (Psalms 63:6). We will feel tremendous joy and satisfaction in our service of God.

The ultimate reward is to “inherit two worlds,” to live an elevated existence in both the physical and spiritual realms. “I will bless You in my life” - we live a life of blessing in this world when we accept God’s Will. And “In Your name, I will lift up my hands” - when we elevate ourselves beyond our worldly existence, and reach out for the spiritual reality of the future world. Then we will “give praise with songs of joy”. We will sing two songs of joy - a song of this world, and a song of the next.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, II:19)

See also: Noah: The Walk of the Righteous

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

to: weekly@ohr.edu

subject: Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Noach

For the week ending 13 October 2018 / 4 Heshvan 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Catch the Wind

“...and G-d caused a spirit (ruach) to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided” (8:1)

People often say, “If there is a spirit in Man, why can’t we see it?”

In this week’s Torah portion there’s a difference of opinion about how to translate the word ruach in the above verse. Rashi and others translate it as “spirit”, whereas the Ramban translates ruach as “wind”.

Just as the wind is invisible, but it blows the leaves through the air and moves them around on the ground, so too the spirit inside us cannot be seen but it motivates every part of our body.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

date: Oct 11, 2018, 7:48 PM

OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Noach: Survivors of Trauma

There are many words in the English language that originally had great power but have become watered down over the years to the point of meaninglessness. One such word is “survivor.” Another is “trauma.”

When I think back to my early adult life I remember the word “survivor” being reserved for those who endured a severe crisis but, either because of their exceptional skills or good fortune, emerged from it with minimal physical harm. They resumed relatively normal lives but had to cope with a variety of practical and emotional challenges.

Nowadays, the word “survivor” is applied freely even to those who have experienced the normal and expected daily difficulties which all human beings face and who have simply gone on living. “Survivor” has thus become a term that easily fits all of us.

A similar observation could be made about the word “trauma.” It was originally used to describe catastrophic conditions of great suffering, such as war, life-threatening illness, and natural disasters. Nowadays, the term is used freely to describe far lesser events. So much so that I recently overheard an ardent sports fans refer to her favorite team’s loss of several consecutive ball games as a “recurring trauma.”

Just last week, we began to reread the Pentateuch, the Chumash or “Five Books of Moses.” This week, we read the second of a year-long series of weekly Torah portions, Parshat Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32). Throughout the coming year, we will search for the common themes of all of these readings. There is one theme which, I suggest, pervades not only the Chumash, but the entire Jewish Bible. Indeed, it pervades all of Jewish history, down to this very day.

This theme is the story of the “survivor;” the person who lives through trauma and who copes, one way or another, with life as a survivor, with life after trauma.

One such person is the hero of this week’s Torah portion, Noah. Noah survived the destruction of all of civilization. In the words of our Sages, he lived to see “a built-up world, a destroyed world, and a rebuilt world.” Noah was a “survivor of trauma,” no doubt about it.

There are many other candidates in the Bible who merit the term “survivor of trauma,” Adam and Eve suffered trauma. They lived in paradise. But they lost it. That’s trauma. They survived and went on to make lives for themselves. That’s survival.

King David suffered trauma and was a survivor. So was Job, and so was Jeremiah. In a sense, so was Jonah.

Names of survivors in the long history of our people come readily to mind and include rabbinic sages such as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Maimonides suffered trauma and

survived mightily, as did Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, who writes at length about the several traumas that he lived through and survived.

Finally, the horrific Holocaust, the ultimate trauma, left numerous survivors, some of whose memoirs are world famous, such as Victor Frankel, Primo Levy, and Eli Wiesel. I, for one, and many of the readers of this column, have known quite a few survivors.

In a sense, we are all survivors. Who can teach us the skills of survival? Let us conceive of Noah as the archetypal survivor. What can we learn from this week's Torah reading about the way he coped with the challenges of survival in the wake of the world's nearly total destruction?

You know the story. Noah and the members of his immediate family find refuge in the Ark from the Great Flood. The flood ends, the waters recede, and finally the Almighty speaks to Noah and says, "Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives." They exit the ark. They survive the trauma.

But then, what does Noah do? What are his first actions as a survivor? He starts off on the proverbial right foot. "Noah built an altar to the Lord... He offered burnt offerings on the altar." Noah expresses his gratitude to the Almighty.

The Almighty responds in kind. He says, "Never again will I doom the earth because of man... Nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done."

The Almighty does not stop there. He goes on to bless Noah and his sons and He establishes an everlasting covenant with them.

So far, so good. But we abruptly learn of Noah's weakness. We read: "Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself within his tent. (Genesis 9:20-21)"

Noah resorts to drink to deal with the challenges that face every subsequent survivor of trauma. He was the first survivor to resort to intoxicating substances to cope with the aftereffects of trauma, but he most certainly was not the last.

Is intoxication the only coping method available to survivors? It is here that I'd like to bring an insight of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch into play.

He notes that the Hebrew word in our verse for "became drunk" is *vayishkar*. The root letters of this word are sh-kh-r. Rav Hirsch notes that there are several other words in Hebrew with similar root letters. Two of them are sh-y-r, song or poem, and sh-k-r, falsehood. He proceeds to explain that these three terms represent three different modes of relationship between truth and reality.

For Rav Hirsch, truth is not synonymous with reality. Reality is what is, whereas truth is what can be. The person who uses sh-y-r, the poetic imagination, knows that he can transform the truth which often lies hidden in the present into a new future reality. He need not live forever in a condition of post-traumatic stress. He can use the truth of his poetic imagination, of his hopes and dreams, to construct a new and better reality. This is the preferred mode for the survivor of trauma.

Noah, however, chose a different mode entirely. He chose sh-kh-r, drink.

Faced with a traumatic reality, he creates for himself a fantasy reality, stimulated by intoxicating substances. He opts for a reality distorted by drink, an artificial reality, an illusion which fades rapidly with time. This is not a solution to the problem of post-traumatic survival.

Then there is a third mode, the mode of sh-k-r, of falsehood. This mode comes in many varieties. We now have a vocabulary for those varieties: denial, false ideologies, alternate facts, fictitious memories. These mechanisms will not dissipate the pernicious effects of traumatic experiences.

Clearly, Rav Hirsch recommends the method of sh-y-r, the cultivation of the positive processes which we all possess, but of which we are seldom aware: Creative imagination, enlisting the cooperation of others, courage, and above all hope.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is wont to explain, "Hope is not optimism and optimism is not hope. Optimism is the conviction that things will be better. Hope is the conviction that we can make things better."

The survivor who effectively deals with the traumas of his or her past strives to make things better, and in the process not only survives but thrives, transcends the painful memories of the past, and painstakingly constructs a better future.

Noah failed as a survivor. Perhaps that is perhaps the essential distinction between him and the hero of next week's Torah portion, Abraham. He too survived traumas, ten trials by the count of our rabbis, but he was able to employ the mode of sh-y-r, not sh-kh-r and not sh-k-r.

He utilized truth to create a new reality, the reality of monotheism and, eventually, the reality of the Jewish people.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Noach

Tire of Babel

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Flood was history. The era of robbery, greed, and corruption was washed away by its powerful waves. Peace and tranquillity reigned. The entire world was now united — against the Almighty.

The world community decided that in the interest of harmony they would join forces and build a colossal tower to reach to the heavens. Then they would ascend the tower and do battle with G-d Himself.

It was an ambitious dream, but they were united and determined.

Hashem, however, had other plans. The Torah tells us that He convened the same tribunal He consulted with in creating man and this time decided that He would not destroy the builders. He would confuse them. He changed their languages so they were not able to communicate. One man would ask for a hammer and receive a nail, a saw, or a blank stare. Enraged, the requestor would then argue with and even strike his fellow builder who was impeding progress. Eventually a small civil war erupted on the construction site. The men dispersed and the construction project was eternally halted. And seventy distinct nations ultimately emerged.

It is puzzling: how does a problem such as lack of communication stop a lofty project of such tremendous scope? Didn't the French and British jointly finish the Chunnel, the tunnel that connects the two countries, under the English Channel?

I once asked my rebbe, Reb Mendel Kaplan, who after escaping from the Nazi inferno lived in Shanghai, China for nearly five years, how he was able to communicate with the Chinese. He held up a dollar. "Everybody understands this language," he said. Don't people of different languages manage to communicate when they want to realize a noteworthy mission? Why was there no way to gather the forces, create new communication techniques, and continue the project?

A college professor was known give difficult tests yet he had a very lenient policy. If a student missed the exam he could take a make-up test the next day. The make-up, however, was always the same test the professor had given the day prior.

15 minutes before the final exam, of a particularly difficult semester, the professor received a phone call. The four voices crowding the phone booth sounded desperate. "Professor, we were on our way to take your final and we got a flat tire. Please let us take a make-up exam tomorrow." "Certainly," the professor responded.

The next day the four young men walked in feeling quite smug. They had reviewed the entire final with a friend who had taken it the day before. The professor seated the four students in different corners of the room. He placed a single sheet of paper in front of each one and stated crisply.

"Today's make-up exam entails just one question. I would like you young men, each in his own way, to write down for me..." he looked at the young men and smiled knowingly — "which tire was flat?"

When the goal entails truth and true good for mankind, when the goals are harmonious with the concepts that transcend culture, language, custom, or vogue, then nothing can impede success.

But when selfishness rules and individual glory and gratification is the motivation, then the simplest problem can cause total disunity, contempt, and ultimately failure.

When our common goals are enveloped in common good, then we can unite under the most difficult of circumstances. However, if our motivations are selfish, the slightest impediment will leave our entire project and mission flat. As flat as the tire of Babel.

Good Shabbos

The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Noah: Holy Eating

We are digging our graves with our teeth. — Thomas Moffett

It seems that literally, since the beginning of time, man has had a struggle with food. The first and only command God gives Adam in the Garden of Eden is as follows: And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

God gives man a very simple command, a very simple diet – don't eat from this one single tree out of the entire garden. However, man is often weak and foolish. He eats from the very tree he was commanded not to eat from. The consequences of his foolishness are so severe that he dooms himself and all of humanity to a mortal existence filled with anguish and tribulations that extend to our very day.

The Berdichever on Genesis 6:21 (Noah) notes that when God commands Noah to construct his famous ark and gather the animal kingdom into it, he also directs him to "take for yourself of all food that will be fed."

Besides being the permission for humanity to discontinue their previously vegetarian diet, allowing man to eat animals as well, there is a deeper meaning that hints at how mankind can repair the enormous spiritual damage Adam caused by violating God's initial, single stated prohibition. The way to repair the original food sin is an extensive, detailed, comprehensive and highly regulated biblical and rabbinic approach to food. The Bible has literally dozens of commandments that are concerned with food. What to eat, what not to eat, when and where to eat it. The Rabbis conveyed more details, explanations and safeguards as to what we put in our mouth, how an animal must be slaughtered, what the health of the carcass needs to be, how to prepare the food, what tithes and gifts must be separated from the food, what blessings need to be said both before and after eating, what can and can't be eaten together, how much time to wait between consuming meat and dairy products and much more.

The Berdichever explains that with every single food-related commandment we perform, every single food-related prohibition we abide by, we are correcting Adam's sin. The deep, world-affecting damage which Adam caused is rectified by our blessing God for our food, by ensuring that the food we eat is prepared according to the Torah's standards, of eating the right food in the right way at the right time.

Food is a tremendous gift from God. When we partake of it properly, in a holy fashion, we elevate the food, we elevate the process and we elevate ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom

*Dedication - To one of my favorite Torah books: "To Your Health, The Torah Way to a Healthy Life in Modern Times," by Yechezkel Ishayek
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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il

subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Noah (Genesis 6:9-11:32)

By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Noah was a righteous man, whole-hearted in his generations; Noah walked with God." (Genesis 6:9)

Was Noah truly righteous? And what does true righteousness entail? At first blush, this shouldn't even be a question. Surely, the opening verse of the portion suggests that it's an open and shut case. After all, does any other figure in the Torah receive three adulatory statements in one verse, or even come close to such seemingly boundless praise? Not even Moses is called a tzadik (righteous man).

Before the testimonials for Noah are approved and sealed, Rashi reminds us that although certain Sages look upon Noah favorably, others were meager with their praise. The text states, 'righteous... wholehearted.' the Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) suggests that there are two ways to interpret this qualifying phrase: on the one hand, if he is so worthy of praise in a generation so completely evil, how much more praiseworthy would he have been in the generation of Abraham when he would have had righteous company. On the other hand, perhaps the qualifying phrase suggests that Noah is only praiseworthy in comparison with his generation of scoundrels. Had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not even be worthy of mention.

But the question remains: Why even suggest the possibility that Noah is second-rate when the plain meaning of the text is so adulatory? Let us compare and contrast Noah and Abraham in similar circumstances. When Abraham is told that the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed, he argues with the Almighty as though he were bargaining in the marketplace of Jerusalem's Mahane Yehudah: Will the Almighty destroy the righteous with the wicked, will not the Judge of the entire earth do justice? If there are fifty righteous men, forty righteous men... even ten righteous men, will the cities not be saved? {Gen. 18–22}

In stark contrast, when Noah is informed of the impending destruction of the world, he obediently goes about constructing a private ark to rescue himself, his family, and a requisite number of earthly creatures. While Abraham emerges as the missionary who breaks walls as well as idols, as one who opens doors to his tent in every direction to welcome and influence as many people as possible, Noah would rather cut himself off from all adverse influences in order to erect an enclosure to protect his high-level communication with his God.

Whether one identifies with the Abraham camp or the Noah camp reflects one's outlook on Judaism and its relationship to the secular, non-religious world. Hassidism, which began as a distinctive Jewish outreach movement, usually sided with Abraham in its biblical interpretations. Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoy, the famous disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov in the eighteenth century, writes in his Toledot Yakov Yosef that when the Torah describes Noah as 'walking with God,' it is a pejorative description. Noah walked only and exclusively with God, tragically neglecting the wayward individuals all around him. Noah missed the opportunity of bringing God to humanity.

On the other hand, the Ketav Sofer, probably reacting to the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) and the Reform movement which threatened the Orthodox community during his lifetime (Pressburg, Hungary, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), utilizes his biblical commentary to justify turning inwards. He argues that Noah was absolutely correct in maintaining the wall between himself and the world. After all, Noah had good reason to fear that if he went outside into the prevailing winds and currents, his own children might be tossed to the edges – and even cast beyond the pale – by their strong impact. The risk just wasn't worth it.

Interestingly, the Ketav Sofer was projecting the view of his father, the Hatam Sofer, one of the major leaders of Ashkenazi Jewry who vehemently fought against the breaches into traditional Judaism during his lifetime. He insisted that hadash is forbidden by the Torah. The Ketav Sofer argued that the behavior of the prophet Samuel's wayward children was a direct consequence of the fact that their father preached all over Israel and returned home for only one visit each year (tekufat ha-shana). If you go out to save the world, you might lose your own progeny!

Clearly, there is no singular view in the biblical and rabbinic sources. However, it is the outgoing Abraham, and not the in-reaching Noah, who is declared the first Jew. We are unequivocally commanded to teach our fellow co-religionists who are straying from the path. Maimonides goes so far as to define the commandment to love God as directing us to ensure that God is beloved and known throughout the world, and insists that God instructed Moses to teach Israel the 613 commandments and the rest of the world the seven laws of morality. Further, our prophets instruct us to be a 'light unto the nations,' the Torah defines our mission as a kingdom of priest-teachers, and the Aleinu prayer sets forth the vision of perfecting the world under the kingdom of ethical monotheism. Faced with the contemporary challenges of assimilation and alienation of many Jews from traditional Judaism, can one mediate a balanced position between the Abrahams and the Noachs, between the advocates of in-reach and practitioners of out-reach?

I believe that the correct balance is suggested by Rabbi Yitzhak Arama in his commentary Akedat Yitzhak, in his remarks on the mishna in the Ethics of our Fathers (1,18):

Raban Shimon ben Gamliel says: 'the world endures on three things: justice, truth and peace....' (1,18) Justice, he explains, is the relationship between the Jew and his society, our obligation to the world at large. Peace, on the other hand, is shalom bayit, the relationship between the Jew and his home, our obligation to family. And truth is the balanced combination of both. I would add the beautiful Mishnah in the beginning of the Ethics of our Fathers which came before the Mishnah just cited:

"Be Among the disciples of Aaron, the High Priest: Love peace, pursue peace, love all of humanity (including Gentiles) and bring them close to Torah".

Shabbat Shalom