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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON NOACH - 5786

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Parshas Noach

Keep on Growing! **By Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Noach Found "Chein" in the Eyes of Hashem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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TIMELINE OF NOACH AND THE MABUL

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

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

Noach’s life and the Great Flood.

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

11. Elul 23: The dove is sent out a second time and returns with an olive leaf.
12. Tishrei 1 (early fall): The dove is sent for the third time and does not return, signaling the earth is dry.
13. Cheshvan 27: The ground is completely dry, and Noach exits the teivah.
14. Noach’s death: Noach lived for 350 more years after the flood, dying at the age of 950.

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Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha

Noach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Noach - True Morality Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whoever sheds the blood of man,

By man shall his blood be shed;

For in the image of God has God made man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Noach

Compounded Interest

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

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

And so, the Torah tells us, "Now the earth had become corrupt before G-d; and the earth had become filled with robbery. And G-d saw the earth and behold it was perverse, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. G-d said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them

from the earth” (Genesis 6:11-13).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Rav Kook Torah

Noah: The Beauty of Greece

After the Flood, Noah blessed his son Yefeth:

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

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

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

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

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

Studying Greek Wisdom

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

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

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

Style versus Content

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Do the Sages Feel Compelled to Denigrate Noah?

By Rabbi YY Jacobson

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

Henry Kissinger’s Suit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Debate on Noah's Persona

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Denigrate a Hero?

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

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

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

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

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

Who Can Change the World?

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

An achievement indeed, if there was ever one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uniform Biographies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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Taamei Hamitzvos - Procreation

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

(Mitzvah 1 in Sefer HaChinuch)

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

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

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

The commentaries offer several reasons for this Mitzvah:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Noach

Don't be like Noah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

than on being like Noah. Shabbat Shalom.

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Parshas Noach

Rav Yochanan Zweig

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

Clothes Call

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peace or Piece?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One More Conversation with Rabbi Hauer z”l

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

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

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

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

another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

וְהָיוּ הַמְּדַבְּרִים אֶל-פַּרְעֹה מִלִּדְמֵי-מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא.....רַעַל מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

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

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

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

וְהָיוּ הַמְּדַבְּרִים אֶל-פַּרְעֹה מִלִּדְמֵי-מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא, with a sense of mission from beginning to end and with righteousness.

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

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

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

Fw

From Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

AVRAHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II THE MIDRASH

A: PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And Haran died in front of Terach his father.

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

Terach was an idolater.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And smashed all the idols,

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

When his father came, he said to him:

"Who did this to them?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I will throw you into it.

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

He said [to himself] Either way;

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

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

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

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

C: THE OVERALL QUESTION

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

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

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

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

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

D: THE THESIS

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

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

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

III RECONSTRUCTING THE MIDRASH

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

A: Terach the idolater

B: Terach the salesman

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation

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

F: Haran and “Pascal’s Wager”

A: Terach the Idolater

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

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

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

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

B: Terach the Salesman

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

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

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

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

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation

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

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

shame, the customer slinks out of the shop.

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

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

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

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

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

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

D: Avraham's meeting with Nimrod

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

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

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

Avraham is also considered royalty:

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

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

E: Avraham in the fire

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is, however, one description of the Egyptian sojourn which appears in three places in T'nakh. In D'varim 4:20, I Melakhim 8:51 and Yirmiyah 11:4, the Egypt from which we were redeemed is called an iron furnace

(*kzrc ruf*). So...if G-d presents Himself, as it were, to Avraham, with the words "that took you out" and we have no information as to what it was from which Avraham was saved, we can look at the parallel passage and, using the description of Egypt found throughout T'nakh, conclude that Avraham was saved from - a furnace!

F: Haran and "Pascal's Wager"

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Avraham and Lot needed to separate, Avraham offered Lot his choice: "If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will take the left" - meaning that they will divide up the mountain range between north (left) and south (right). Avraham abjured Lot to remain in the mountains, a place of greater faith and solitude (see, inter alia, D'varim 11:10-12). Instead, Lot chose the "easy life" of S'dom, which, at the time, appeared as "the garden of Hashem, the land of Egypt" - lush and fertile. We have discussed the attitudinal implications of his choice elsewhere.

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

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

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

Parashat Noah:

Noah in the Garden of Eden

Rabbi Alex Israel

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

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

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

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

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

THE SYMMETRY OF THE FLOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 8 AS CREATION

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

rebuilding. He argued that chapter 8 was a

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

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

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

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

Here too, God pronounces after the Mabul:

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

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

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

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

NOACH GETS DRUNK

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

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

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

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

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

NOACH IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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

Now, here: Chapter 8-9 is the NEW creation. So our story is a parallel to Gan Eden. Note the following parallels between the Gan Eden story and Noah's vineyard:

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

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

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

TEMPTATION

The Ramban writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"According to one midrash (Bereishit Rabba 34:6), Noah incredulously asks "Should I go out and propagate the world only to see it destroyed?" Hashem needs to reassure Noah and convince Noah to emerge and once again begin the building of a world. ... Noah's descent to the bottle reflects the response of escapism. When a person can not face the overwhelming ugliness about, he can always take refuge in a variety of mind numbing sedatives." The deafening silence of a world uninhabited haunts Noah. He cannot come to terms with the fact that other than his family, everyone is dead, and he is the lone survivor. And in this parsha then, Noah becomes the anti-hero of the story. Rather than being the Tzaddik who can save the world[7], he turns face against the world, refusing to further its progress, abandoning the world-building that awaits.[8] But how might this relate to Gan Eden? On the one hand, we could propose that Noah's escapism is the cardinal sin of that generation. However, a learned friend once suggested to me a more radical thought that follows this line of thinking. Noah rolls about naked – just like Adam and Eve - in the garden because he wants to return to Gan Eden. He desires to recreate the old world where there was no sin, to return to a pre-sin state. He tries to replant Gan Eden, and he thrusts himself into a state of mind where he is drunk; where rather than eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he has an absence of knowledge! Of course, it didn't work! The text states that, "he knew what his younger son had done to him." He does have knowledge. He cannot return. Indeed it is his son, Cham, who mocks his father's nakedness, as if to say: "Dad, you cannot live in a virtual reality. You are trying to rebuild the past. Face the future!" But of course, in this sad image, Noah is incapable of facing the future.

THE EXILE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

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

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

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

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

NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

שאין לך, גפן היה: רבי מאיר אומר, תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מ' עמוד א' יידתניא אילן שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון וישת מן היין וישכר'+בראשית ט': שנאמר, דבר שמביא יללה על האדם אלא יין

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

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

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

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

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