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To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>

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Table of Contents:

- R' Bezalel Rudinsky on Noach's Emunah & Avraham's Mission
- R' Zalman Sorotzkin on the Covenant of the Rainbow
- R' Asher Weiss on the Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach
- CS collection on What Was Wrong with Migdal Bavel?
- R' Yissocher Frand on Finding the Rainbow in Every Person
- R' Moshe Lichtenstein: Why Roni Akarah Belongs to Parashas Noach
- R' YY Jacobson on Noach: The Hero for the Simple People

Adapted from

ספר משכן בצלאל על בראשית by Rav Bezalel Rudinsky

The Righteousness of Noach and the Greatness of Avraham

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

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

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

Noach Needed Support

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

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

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

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

Noach Believed and Did Not Believe

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

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

The Steipler & Rav Shach: Intellectual Emunah and Felt Emunah

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

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

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

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

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

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

Avraham's Reward Was Preserved

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

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

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

Working on Hashem's Account

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

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

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

Siyata d'Shmaya and the Tzibbur

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

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

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

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

The Teivah Was Meant to Reach the Generation

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

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

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

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

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Found Avraham

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

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

Adapted from

אזנים לתורה by Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (1880-1966)

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

Hashem Spoke to the Heart That Had Condemned the World

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

Earlier, when all flesh had corrupted its way, the Torah said *אל יתעצב אל* - *He was grieved in His heart* (Bereishis 6:6). From that grief came the decree *אמחה את האדם אשר בראתי מעל פני האדמה* - *I will blot out man whom I created from the face of the earth* (Bereishis 6:7). Now Hashem speaks, as it were, to that very heart from which the decree of the *Mabul* had issued. *לא אסף לקלל עוד את האדמה בעבור האדם* - *I will not again curse the ground because of man*; *כי כאשר* - *as when* *אסף עוד להכות את כל חי כאשר* - *I will not again strike every living thing as I have done* (Bereishis 8:21). The heart that had demanded judgment would no longer demand the destruction of the earth and all its inhabitants. There is a well-known criticism of Noach. He did not pray for his generation as Avraham later prayed for Sodom. The Zohar therefore connects the waters of the *Mabul* with Noach himself, *מי נח* - *the waters of Noach* (Yeshayahu 54:9). There is also a second question: after living so many years among his generation, why had Noach apparently failed to bring even one person closer to Hashem? These are separate criticisms, but both raise the same difficulty. How did the Noach who entered the *teivah* become the Noach whose *korban* brought a promise of mercy for all future generations?

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

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

A World in Which Man Must Work

עד כל ימי הארץ זרע וקציר וקר וחם וקיץ וחרף ויום ולילה לא ישבתו - *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease* (Bereishis 8:22). This is more than a promise that another *Mabul* will not come. It describes a changed world.

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

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

You Do Your Part, and I Will Do Mine

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

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

Why Is the Rainbow Described Three Times?

א-ת קשתי נתתי בענן והיתה לאות בריתי ביני ובין הארץ - *I have placed My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth* (Bereishis 9:13). A few verses later the Torah says *הקשת* - *the rainbow will appear in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant that is between Me and you and every living creature* (Bereishis 9:14-15). Then it says a third time *והיתה הקשת בענן וראיתיה לזכר ברית עולם בין אלקים ובין כל נפש חיה בכל* - *the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will see it to remember the eternal covenant between Elokim and every living creature of all flesh upon the earth* (Bereishis 9:16).

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

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

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

The Rainbow Is Also a Call to Teshuvah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adapted from

by **Rav Asher Weiss**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Was Wrong with Migdal Bavel?

Collection of sources by **Chaim Ozer Shulman**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Torah's description of the bricks can now be understood in another way as well. There was no stone available in Shinar, so mankind found another solution: *הבה נלכנה לבנים* - *let us make bricks*. This was an impressive human achievement. There is nothing wrong with making bricks or developing the physical world. But Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer describes what happened when the project itself became supreme: *ואם נפל אדם ומת לא היו שמים לבם אליו ואם נפלה לבנה* - *if a person fell and died, they paid no attention to him; but if a brick fell, they sat and cried*. The building that was supposed to serve human beings had become more important than the human beings who were building it. Now *ונעשה לנו שם* - *let us make ourselves a name* acquires a deeper significance. Human intelligence, technology and organization had ceased to be merely tools. The great human enterprise was becoming a monument to man himself.

We are therefore left with several different explanations. **Chazal and Rashi** emphasize rebellion against Hashem and confidence in human power. **Rashbam** sees a refusal to fulfill Hashem's plan that mankind spread throughout the earth. The **Netziv** sees what a determination to remain completely unified could become. **Abarbanel and the Akeidas Yitzchak** focus on a civilization that had begun to make its own organization and achievements into an end. These explanations need not be forced into one theory. Chazal themselves speak of different groups with different motives. But neither must they exclude one another.

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

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

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

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

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

to: ravfrand@torah.org

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Rav Frand - Parshas Noach

Finding the Rainbow in Every Person

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adapted and summarized from

עיונים בפרקי הפטרות by Rav Moshe Lichtenstein

בין רני עקרה לעניה סערה

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

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

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

Two Different Forms of Suffering

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

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

So too with *Klal Yisrael* in *galus*. There were periods when Jewish life in exile was not marked by immediate physical persecution. Jews could earn a livelihood and even live with a measure of security. Yet there remained a deeper fear: Where is all of this leading? Can a nation remain in exile forever? Will there still be a Jewish people generations from now? The tragedy of the *akarah* is therefore not primarily what hurts today. It is the fear that there is no tomorrow. The *aniyah so'arah* suffers in precisely the opposite way. Her future may eventually improve, but that does not lessen the storm in which she presently finds herself. She is poor, humiliated, frightened and battered by circumstances. The problem is not that she cannot imagine tomorrow. It is that today itself is unbearable. The two prophecies therefore address two different experiences of *galus*. One is the despair of a people that sees no future. The other is the suffering of a people crushed by the present.

Two Different Consolations

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

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

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

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

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

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

Israel as Servant and Israel as Beloved

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

עניה סערה places greater emphasis on Israel as the servant of Hashem. Its language culminates in *זאת נחלת עבדי ה' וצדקתם מאתי* - *This is the inheritance of the servants of Hashem, and their righteousness is from Me* (Yeshayahu 54:17). Here redemption comes to a people who serve Hashem, fulfill His will and receive the inheritance promised to His servants.

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

Is Redemption Earned or Given?

This leads to another important difference.

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

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

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

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

Why Roni Akarah Belongs to Parashas Noach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two Prophecies, One Haftara

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

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

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

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

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>

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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?

Henry Kissinger's Suit

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

When he arrives in Paris and presents the material to the skilled tailor, the man measures his body and says: "Sorry, Mr. Kissinger, but a man your size needs at least another two inches of material." Surprised, Dr. Kissinger continues his journey to London. There, the tailor says, "I am sorry, Mr. Secretary of State, but to turn this into a suit for your physique, I need another three inches of the material." Disappointed, he arrives in Beijing. There the widely acclaimed Chinese tailor remarks, "I really don't understand what you were thinking, Mr. Kissinger. Your body is far larger than this material. We need another five inches."

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

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

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

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

The Debate on Noah's Persona

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

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

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

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

The Talmud offers two opposing explanations. In the words of Rashi: Among the sages, there are those who interpret this as praise of Noah: If he was righteous in his [corrupt] generation, certainly he would have been even more righteous had he lived in a generation of righteous people. Others interpret it negatively: In relation to his

wicked generation he was righteous; had he been in Abraham's generation he would not have amounted to anything.[2]

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

Why Denigrate a Hero?

Yet there is something disturbing about this discussion. The Torah is clearly trying to highlight Noah's virtue. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d," is how the previous portion concludes.[3] Then, we have the above verse: "This is the history of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was wholesome in his generation; Noah walked with G-d." Later in the portion G-d says to Noah: "I have found you righteous before Me in this generation." G-d, clearly, is trying to extoll Noah. What drove some Rabbis to denigrate him and say that relative to other generations he would amount to nothing special? Besides, when you can choose a complimentary interpretation and perspective, what drives some to choose a negative and condescending interpretation?[4] It runs against the instructions of the Torah to give people the benefit of the doubt.

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

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

Who Can Change the World?

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

An achievement indeed, if there was ever one.

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

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

Noah was a fine man, who lived a decent, moral life, and tried to do what G-d wanted, but was not without his flaws, doubts, and struggles. Compared to Abraham he would not amount to much. But look what this simple fellow achieved! In a society dripping with greed and temptation, Noah held to his morals, walked with G-d, and swam against the tide, saving the planet from destruction. Civilization survived not because of a towering, titanic figure; but because of a simple man who had the courage to live morally when everyone around him behaved despicably.

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

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

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

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

Uniform Biographies

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

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

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

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

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

The girl picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water, and

turning to the man, said, "It made a difference to that one!"

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

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

Footnotes: [1] Sanhedrin 108a [2] In the Talmud *ibid.* it's a debate between Rabbi Yochanan (derogatory) and Reish Lakish (complimentary). Rabbi Chanina continues to say: "Rabbi Yochanan's view may be illustrated by the parable of a jar of wine stored in a cellar filled with jars of vinegar. In such a place, the fragrance of the wine is sensed, because of the vinegar's fumes; in any other place, its fragrance might not be sensed. Rabbi Oshaiya said: Resh Lakish's view may be illustrated by a vial of fragrant oil lying amid excrement: if its fragrance is sensed even in such surroundings, how much more so amid spices!" Perhaps we can suggest that these two sages' dispute is connected to their own life story. Rabbi Yochanan was raised in piety and holiness; Reish Lakish was a gangster and gladiator who later became one of the greatest Torah sages of his age (Talmud Bava Metizah 84b). Reish Lakish, remembering his past, and knowing the dark side of human nature and its great potency, teaches that if Noah could succeed in his corrupt generation to live morally, certainly he would have been righteous in a more spiritual generation. Reish Lakish understood the depth of the human struggle against darkness and the enormity of the challenge some people face, and he could only stand in awe of Noah's moral standing in his generation. Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, could not fully appreciate what Noah had to contend against. Yet the questions in this essay are still unanswered. [3] Genesis 6:8 [4] In the Ethics of our Fathers (1:6) we are enjoined to "judge every person favorably," giving them the benefit of the doubt. It is the sages who go so far as to declare that "the Torah is loath to speak negatively even of a non-kosher animal" (Talmud Bava Basra 123a; Pesachim 3a), a lesson derived from this very portion of Noah! If the clause "in his generations" can be understood both ways, why propose a negative interpretation? In the words of the famed Polish-Italian Talmudic sage and commentator the Beer Sheva (Rabbi Yissachar Ber Eilenberg, 1550-1623): "כל ימי הייתי קוהה מאחר שאין לו הכרע אם לגנאי או לשבח נאמר בדורותיו, א"כ קשה על רבי יוחנן למה משכו נפשו לדורשו לגנאי" (באר שבע סנהדרין דף קח, א). Since the term "in his generation," can be explained positively or negatively, why did Reb Yochanan's soul compel him to explain it disgracefully?" [5] Genesis 7:1 [6] The Rebbe shared this during a public address ("farbrengen") on Shabbos Parshas Noah 5725, October 10, 1964. Published in *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 5 pp. 281-283. On another occasion, the Rebbe shared another explanation (*Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25 Parshas Noah). Briefly: The sages had some independent criticism of Noah for not trying to save his generation (see *Zohar Bereishis* 66; 107). When they observed the term "in his generation," they understood that this was written to underscore the flaw of Noah. They felt it was important to bring out this flaw not in order to denigrate Noah (especially since in his position he may have done the best he could) but to caution others not to follow in the same direction. What is more, Noah himself would appreciate this interpretation so that his behavior (which may have been right during his time, under those unique circumstances) should not serve as a paradigm for others at other times. [7] Genesis 9:20] Rashi to Genesis 7:7, quoting Midrash Rabah Bereishis 32:6