

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**he waters then receded from upon the earth, receding continuously, and the waters diminished at the end of a hundred and fifty days” (Beraishis 8:3, ArtScroll translation). If the waters were “receding continuously,” then they would have diminished right away, not after 150 days. How can the verse tell us, in the same sentence, that they receded, but had not diminished until 150 days had passed?

Actually, this is almost a trick question, because I’ve pretty much taken the verse out of its context. Once put into the context of the previous verses, this question doesn’t really exist. However, that “context” changes, depending on how those previous verses are understood, thereby giving the above verse different meanings.

Here’s what we do know from the previous verses: There was a period of 40 days and 40 nights of non-stop rain, when the waters from below the ground and from the heavens (see 7:11-12) caused enough flooding to lift the fully-loaded ark off the ground (7:17), eventually covering even the mountaintops (7:19) and rising 15 cubits above them (7:20). These waters were “strengthened” for 150 days (7:24), until G-d “remembered” Noach (et al) and calmed the waters (8:1). We are informed that the sources of the flooding were stopped (8:2) before being told that the waters receded, diminishing after 150 days (8:3). A simple reading would indicate, then, that our verse is simply telling us that the waters started receding after the previously mentioned 150 days of the waters having “strengthened.” But if that is what the verse is trying to convey, the wording is still a bit peculiar. We already know that the waters didn’t start receding until after G-d calmed them, so why repeat that it wasn’t until after the 150 days had passed? And even if, for some reason, it must be clarified that it was after these 150 days, the words “and the waters diminished” still seem to be extraneous, as the verse could have conveyed the same thing had it only said that “they receded (continuously) after (the) 150 days.” So what is this verse really trying to tell us?

According to the Ramban (8:4), the 150 days included the 40 days of non-stop rain, so that the amount of water stopped increasing after 40 days and stayed consistent (if turbulent) for the last 110 of those

days. After the 150 days, not only did the waters begin to recede, but G-d caused such a severe amount of drying and recession on that first day that the ark rested on top of one of the mountains. Most say that it was not for another 2 months that enough water had receded for the ark to sit on the mountain, but the Ramban says that it was on the 151st day. Our verse is therefore telling us how much “the waters diminished at the end of 150 days,” i.e. on the very next day.

The Abarbanel agrees with the Ramban, except that he is of the opinion that the waters started to diminish on the 41st day. They were considered “strong” waters for 150 days because the sheer volume of water that accumulated over those first 40 days “overpowered” the earth, and did so even after starting to recede. It was only after 150 days that the waters were no longer “overpowering” the earth (hence the end of the period of the “strengthened waters”). Although this might be a valid explanation for the verse telling us that “the waters diminished after 150 days,” i.e. even though they had already been receding, they no longer “overpowered” the landmass, the Abarbanel agrees that there was such severe drying on day 151 that this is the intent of the verse.

The Malbim (8:3) has a similar approach, saying that although the waters receded during the 150-day period, it was impossible to know this (after all, even the mountaintops were still covered) until the ark rested on the mountain, making it clear that they in fact had been receding. This didn’t occur until after the 150th day, when (according to these commentaries) the ark rested. However, since most commentaries say that the ark didn’t rest until 2 months later, the possibility (for them) that the verse means “noticeably diminished” rather than “actually diminished” is negated.

It would be theoretically possible to say that while the waters were added during the full 150 days (i.e. through intermittent rain, etc.), they also started to recede after 40, creating a “whirlpool” type effect that would be quite turbulent. The verse could then be saying that waters had already begun to recede, but because there were other waters added at the same time, the total amount didn’t begin to diminish until after 150 days.

The Radak (7:24) says that the 150 days of “strengthened waters” didn’t begin until after the 40 days/nights of non-stop rain had ended, but those rains

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caused the underground water to break through the soaked land and continue to add vast amounts of water for 150 days (7:11). There was then a *second* period of 150 days during which the additional waters that had accumulated during the first 150 days receded (8:3). Our verse is telling us that although the waters were continuously receding during this 2nd 150-day period, it was only *after* it had ended that waters had diminished below the levels it had reached during the 40 days, before the first period of 150 days.

Rashi also has the 150 days starting after the 40 days/nights were over, with the waters first starting to recede (and diminish) at the conclusion of the 150 days (8:3). The waters had been growing ("getting stronger") until then, so the verse could be telling us that they receded immediately after the 150 day period had ended, with no in-between period of the water being calmed (and not growing) but not yet receding. Rashi's words imply this, as after quoting the verse saying, "at the end of the 150 days," he adds, "they began to diminish." The verse itself says they diminished, so the added words, Rashi is explaining, are to tell us that "they began to diminish" right away, as soon as the 150 days had ended.

So how could the waters be said to have diminished after 150 days if we were just told that they had been receding continuously? Depending on the context of the timeline of the flood, there might be numerous possibilities. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At the conclusion of the deluge, G-d proclaimed that "while the earth remains...day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22) Rashi deduces from this verse that the natural progression of day and night, ceased to exist during the time of the flood.

Since this verse mentions day before night, the position of Rashbam that at creation day preceded night makes sense. Before the Great Flood, we were sun people with the day being paramount.

Only much later, after we left Egypt did G-d proclaim that we were to become moon people-that the day would begin at night.

What then is the conceptual difference between the sun and moon? There is a deep difference between

these two approaches. It has been noted that the sun represents sameness. This because it is always the same size. Kohelet writes "there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) In other words, tomorrow is no different than today, today is no different than yesterday. When facing challenges there is little hope that there can be any change-everything seems to be the same as it was and will always remain stagnant.

The moon, however, fluctuates in size. It diminishes and eventually vanishes only to reappear. Thus the Hebrew word for moon, chodesh, is similar to chadash which means new. The moon teaches that no matter the obstacles, we have the power to renew ourselves and overcome.

While our calendar is primarily lunar, it is solar as well. Every few years a month is added to the lunar year so that the lunar cycle be in sync with the solar. The emphasis on the ever-changing moon with a need to acknowledge the consistent solar cycle, teaches that life is made up of a balance of sameness and newness. Some things remain as they always were; other things have the capacity to change.

Events in Israel speak to this balance. On the one hand, all seems the same. Jews are being murdered because they are Jews. The world by and large blames us. The message of the sun is alive and well. Things today seem no different than throughout history.

In the same breath, the lunar side of our calendar reminds us that all need not be the same. One should not be overly pessimistic. No doubt we face serious challenges, the likes of which I believe we've never faced since the establishment of the state.

So while we were originally sun people with day preceding night, we, in time, learned to infuse the sun with the spirit of the moon. Night precedes day. No matter how bleak and how the same life seems, we must always be alive and hopeful for a different reality than before, a new dawn - when our people can live in unity without fear - when real shalom will prevail. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And G-d said to Noah and his sons with him, saying, 'And as for Me, behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your offspring after you... Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood... to destroy the earth...' (Gen. 9:8-11)

Our Bible seems to be filled with covenants (Hebrew, britot): the "covenant" here as Noah and his family are saved from the world-wide deluge (the Ice Age?, the flood of the ancient utnapish-tim legend?) and emerge from their ark, the "covenant" which G-d makes with Abraham "between the (animal) parts" (Gen 15), the covenant which G-d makes with the Israelites

after their exodus from Egypt when they received the Code of Divine Revelation at Sinai (Exodus 24:1-11), and the covenant which G-d makes with the Israelites-- but which the Talmudic sages insist must be translated into all seventy human languages (and therefore includes all of humanity) -- just before their entry into the land of Israel (Deut. 27, 28). Are all of these covenants co-existent, or does the later covenant displace the former? And what is the precise meaning of the term covenant (brit)?

I believe that each of these different covenants has a unique significance and that they all operate simultaneously. In this particular commentary I shall attempt to define the origin of the Hebrew term for covenant, brit, and to demonstrate how this initial covenant with Noah is the very foundation -- stone for all subsequent covenants, and indeed for the very creation of the universe!

The very first time the word brit occurs in the Bible is before Noah exited from the ark (which we cited above); it first appears when Noah first entered the ark: "But I (G-d) will establish My covenant (brit) with you and you (together with your family and representatives of the animals) shall enter the ark..." (Gen. 6:18). In his commentary on this verse, the Ibn Ezra gives two explanations of the word brit:

1) Freely-chosen commitments agreed upon by two beings, from the Hebrew verb bru (Samuel 1, 17:8).

2) The cutting of the flesh of an animal divided into two parts, with the blood joining together as one, from the Hebrew btr, to cut or pierce (see Gen. 15, as in a pact of blood brothers).

The Ramban amazingly connects the Hebrew word brit to the very first verse of the Bible, bereishit bara, "In the beginning He created;" in effect, the Hebrew brit is based upon the verb bariti, "I (G-d) created" a world which emanated from Me, which is part of Me, and which must therefore last eternally within Me. The covenant of the eternity of the world, the eternity of humanity, is built into the very fabric of a world which emanates from the Divine! In the later story of the Divine covenant with Abraham, the Ramban adds that a covenant differs from a contract; a contract is conditional whereas a covenant is eternal, guaranteed by G-d Himself. Hence, humanity will never be destroyed completely! -- a most optimistic promise especially in our nuclear age.

After all, did not the Almighty bless Adam and Eve with eternal progeny, "You shall be fruitful and multiply and fill the land; You shall conquer it and establish domain over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and all the beasts who crawl on the earth" (Gen 1:28). This is the true meaning of the Divine statement, "But I will establish My covenant with you and you shall enter the ark" (ibid). G-d is affirming His guarantee that there will always be a human remnant populating the earth.

On the basis of all of these explanations of the term brit, the climax of our Torah reading-G-d's commitments to Noah and his descendants, G-d's demand upon Noah and his descendants based upon his previous moral actions, and the rainbow as the sign-symbol of the covenant-becomes magnificently clear. G-d promises that neither the seasons which affect agriculture nor the day-night cycle of daily living will cease from appearing, and blesses Noah and his family with fruitfulness and mastery over the earth. (Gen. 8:22,9:

1-3). He then demands, at the same time that he permits humanity to eat animal flesh, that humans refrain from eating the limbs and blood of a living animal, and that humans especially refrain from murdering each other: "Whoever sheds another human's blood will have his blood shed by human judges, since every human was created in the image of G-d" (Gen. 9:4-7). A covenant of mutual commitments agreed upon freely by G-d and humanity-with the preservation of the created world confirmed and guaranteed by G-d.

And finally the Biblical text informs us that G-d "has set My rainbow in the cloud which shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth..." (Gen. 9:13 ff). The Ramban explains that the rainbow is an invested bow; in the ancient world, when wars were fought with bow and arrow, the inverted bow was a call to peace; the rainbow is an eternal sign that G-d will never wage war against humanity!

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests what I believe is an even deeper symbolism. The varied and dazzling color of the rainbow spectrum--red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, -- are actually all refracted lights of the singular whiteness which is their source. What the rainbow is reminding us is that all the variegated creatures of the universe, and all of the different human shapes, sizes, features, colors and personalities, all find their source and essence in the one Divine Creator from whom they all emanated. From this perspective, the destinies of G-d and universe are linked together; and if we but remember the message of the rainbow, we will never be able to harm another human being or act with cruelty to any creation of the Divine! © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI YISSOCHAR FRAND

RavFrand

There are two famous comments of Rashi toward the end of our Parsha.

At the end of the parsha, the Torah says that "Noach אָחָא " the man of the land אֶרֶץ " planted a vineyard" [Bereshis 9:20]. Rashi comments on the words "the man of the land" (ish haאֶרֶץ (tm)adama) that this connotes that Noach was defined by the land (similar to Elimelech who is described as "ish Naomi" [Rus 1:3]). Noach was the "master of the land".

Ramban notes that this usage sets a precedent (zeh bana av) for such constructs elsewhere in Tanach. The person-"ish"-is defined by what comes after it. The Ramban cites the additional example of "ish haElokim" [Devorim 33:1] by Moshe אִישׁ " the man of G-d, meaning a person who defined himself by G-d. Noach, on the other hand, became a person who was defined by the land.

Earlier, Rashi comments on the expression "vaYachel Noach" (literally "Noach began"-from the same root as "techila" -אִישׁ " beginning). Rashi explains that the word "vaYachel" connotes that Noach profaned himself (from the root 'chulin' אִישׁ " non-sacred) because his initial planting after the Flood should have been something other than a vineyard.

If we ask the question "Should Noach have planted a vineyard?" the answer is most certainly yes. After all, we must ponder אִישׁ " where did Noach get the vines from, if everything on earth had been totally destroyed? The answer is that together with all the animals which Noach brought onto the Tayva [ark], he took seeds of every kind of tree and plant, to eventually remedy the agricultural destruction that took place during the flood. There is no question that eventually Noach was supposed to replant vineyards. The criticism which Rashi cites in the name of Chazal, is criticizing Noach for making the vineyard his initial planting.

Rav Yeruchum Levovitz explains that this teaches a lesson regarding the importance of proper priorities. There are many things which we must do in this world. We have many obligations. But priorities DEFINE what a person will become. The pasuk says "vaYachel Noach ish haAdamah". Our Sages note that earlier Noach was referred to as a pure and noble spirit (Noach ish Tzadik tamim). Look what happened to him! Suddenly he is called a "man of the earth." Where did he go wrong? Chazal explain that his spiritual descent was extremely subtle. It was not a dramatic rebellion or change of life style. Heaven Forbid! Noach merely misplaced his priorities and planted what should have been a later crop ahead of what should have been earlier plantings.

Noach's inappropriate first priority became his defining essence as mentioned in the previously quoted Rashi. [Ish haAdama <-> Ish haElokim <-> Ish Naomi] The vineyard defined him because that became the number one priority in his life. It is crucial to maintain appropriate priorities.

The second insight I would like to share is also from Rav Yeruchem Levovitz. The end of the parsha contains the incident of the people of Bavel. They wanted to build a tower in the sky. Everyone spoke a single language. We know the rest of the story: "Let's build a tower; let's do battle with G-d." The Master of the World descended, He mixed up their languages

and, as such, they were unable to communicate with one another.

This is a nice story. It is well known. However, most people do not realize that this story is the story of world history. This incident is one of the most seminal events in the history of mankind. What does this event symbolically represent?

The narration begins, "And behold the entire earth spoke one language". Rashi states that this was "the holy tongue". G-d's "Grand Plan" of the world was that there should be unity among people. One of the biggest blessings that the Almighty gave mankind was that there should be unity among people and unity among nations.

G-d is One. He is defined by his Oneness, His Singularity. The master plan for the world was for the world to mirror this sense of unity: One G-d <-> One Language. Had society been able to maintain an environment of One G-d and One Language, people would be able to get along. The people of Bavel, however, rebelled against this concept. They rejected 'One G-d.' They planned to build a tower in heaven and wage war against this 'One G-d.' "We want variety. We do not want to be subject to 'One G-d.'"

G-d responded: "I gave you the opportunity for the greatest blessing in the world and you did not appreciate it. You rebelled against 'oneness.' I will punish you with the worst curse. I am going to give you different languages." G-d allows sinners to walk in the path they choose for themselves. Since they rejected unity, that is exactly what was withheld from them through the 'curse' of many languages.

I once saw a statistic that during the average person's lifetime, he lives through over 500 wars! We are obviously not just counting the 'big' wars (such as WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf Wars, etc.) This also includes the 'little' wars (such as Bosnia, Nicaragua, East Timor, Rwanda, Burundi) which are certainly all wars as well. Why do people fight? The Croats do not like Serbs; the Serbs do not like the Croats. One literally "cannot differentiate the players from one another without a scorecard." It gets so complex that one does not even know for whom to root!

Where does this stem from? Why are the Indonesians and the people from East Timor killing each other? Why have the people of Northern Ireland been killing each other for hundreds of years? There are situations like that all over the globe. People cannot get along. The primary reason for the strife is because of differences between peoples. How did that all start? It all started due to their rejection of 'Oneness.' The Almighty, as a punishment, precluded 'oneness' from the people of Bavel and from the seventy nations who dispersed from that place after that historic event.

Beginning from the Tower of Bavel, people stopped communicating, cultures went their own separate ways, and fighting and strife became

inevitable. The current concept that there will one day be a unified language and a unified Europe will never succeed. It will never succeed because of the curse that descended to the world as a result of the Tower of Babel. Mankind had their chance for unity, but they blew it. G-d assured that mankind would forever live with the disunity that they chose for themselves.

There is a movement in this country to make English the mandatory national language. All documents should be printed only in English. What is the reason for this effort? The reason is the recognition that multiplicity of languages is the first step in the breakdown of society. It is not inconceivable that in our lifetime Canada will break apart because of the French-English dichotomy in various parts of that country. The curse of this week's parsha continues to plague mankind in our own time. When "Hashem Echad" is rejected, the result is a world such as we have witnessed throughout history until this very day. © 2005 Rabbi Y. Frand Transcribed by David Twersky; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman;

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The passage of the rainbow is a group of ten verses (Bereishit 9:8-17) which repeatedly takes note of the covenant related to the rainbow (the word "brit," covenant, appears seven times in the passage, as might be expected of an important keyword). The promise appears twice. "Never again will all flesh be destroyed by waters of the flood, and there will never be another flood to destroy the earth" [9:11]. "The water will never again be a flood, to destroy all the flesh" [9:15]. The rainbow is the symbol of the covenant. Why is the rainbow an appropriate symbol that there will never be another flood on the earth?

We should note that the word rainbow never appears by itself in the passage. The three times it is mentioned it is closely linked to the concept of a "cloud" and this link is what makes it a symbol of the covenant. "I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be a symbol of the covenant between me and the earth" [9:13]... "It will happen when I place a cloud over the earth, the bow will be seen in the cloud" [9:14]... "And the bow will appear in the cloud, and I will see it, in order to remember the eternal covenant" [9:16]. Thus, clearly the symbol is not the rainbow itself but rather the fact that it appears within the clouds.

The bow is not described in general terms but as "my rainbow"-that is, this is not a normal rainbow but rather one that is specifically related to the Almighty. What is G-d's rainbow? In various places in the Torah the bow is described as a weapon used by G-d. For example, "For I have drawn Yehuda as my bow" [Zecharia 9:13]; "He drew his bow like an enemy" [Eichah 2:4]. Similarly, the arrows of a bow are G-d's

weapons (for example, see Devarim 32:23, 32:42). Within the context of this week's Torah portion, it is reasonable to assume that the bow represents the weapon that the Almighty used in order to bring about the flood. In fact, this lends itself to an image viewing the rain of the flood as symbolic arrows that were fired at full strength by a bow.

This explains why the main symbol in the passage of the covenant is not just the rainbow but its appearance within the clouds. A cloud in the Torah is a symbol of something covered and hidden. Several examples of this can be seen. One is G-d's glory, "And G-d's glory settled on Mount Sinai, and it was covered by a cloud for six days" [Shemot 24:16]. Another example is the cover of the Ark in the Tabernacle, "And the cloud of incense will hide the cover which is on the Ark, and he will not die" [Vayikra 16:13]. The same is true for the Tabernacle, "On the day that he built the Tabernacle, the cloud covered it" [Bamidbar 9:15]. Placing the rainbow inside a cloud symbolically means that it has been covered up, like a sword that is returned to its sheath. Thus, this is an action of "withholding fire"-the Almighty puts away His weapon and promises not to use it any more. When clouds appear in the sky and the rainbow appears, it is a sign that the bow remains in its sheath and that the weapon will no longer be used against all of mankind.

Starting at this point in time, the bow will play a new reversed role. The magnificent sight of a rainbow in a cloud has now been transformed into an expression of the greatness of the Almighty. "Like the sight of the rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the shine of the surroundings, it was the look of the image of the glory of G-d" [Yechezkel 1:28].

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

by Rabbi Ronen Neubert, International Bnei Akiva, United States

The Torah portion of Noach is concerned with the total collapse of humanity, leading in the end to almost complete destruction of all living creatures in the flood. The few people who survive the disaster are given a promise by the Almighty that there will never be a second flood. However, the author of "Akeidat Yitzchak," Rabbi Yitzchak Arameh, questions the logic of this promise:

If the punishment of the flood was justified, why does G-d promise never to use it again? And if it was not a just punishment, how could it have been used in the first place? Rabbi Arameh's answer is that all judgment by G-d is certainly just, and there is no doubt that the flood was an appropriate punishment. The explanation of the Divine promise is that the world was about to change such that the situation that might lead to another flood would never happen again.

In the era of the flood, mankind joined together with the objective of doing evil. "And the land was filled

with corruption" [Bereishit 6:11]. However, from the moment of the flood, the world changed. All of mankind would never again gather together for purposes of evil. After the flood, G-d divided humanity into three different groups, descendents of Noach's three sons, which are different in essence and quality. This division was to continue for all generations to come, such that mankind would no longer have the ability to join together with destructive intentions. Thus, the promise by the Almighty is that any gathering of evil will not engulf the entire world. For example, the corruption of Sedom did not spread to the rest of the world, and it did not infect the ethical level of the whole world.

Rabbi Arameh notes that the symbol of the rainbow is also related to the division of humanity after the flood. Just as mankind was separated into different groups from the time of the flood, so are the colors of a rainbow separate from each other. The rainbow is a symbol of a world of division and separation. This symbolism is seen not only in the rainbow but also in what G-d told Noach, "For the remaining days of the earth, planting and harvesting, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will never cease" [Bereishit 8:22]. The world climate is also divided into separate groups. When it is winter on one side of the world, the other side will be warmed by the summer. The different types of weather are another symbol of the division of mankind. Changes in weather are a reflection of the variance between different cultures and the gaps between them.

The events of the flood can teach us how great an opportunity can be missed by joining together for no good purpose. Any attempt to gather together for evil purposes will end with division, isolation, and separation. Only when we learn to gather together in order to do good for each other will mankind once again be privileged to be joined together as one. Only after we mend the world will the divisions disappear, as if to say, "Everybody will become one association, in order to do Your will with a full heart" [Rosh Hashanah prayers]. In response to unity and a true peace, the Sechina will return to the land, as is written, "And G-d will be king over the entire world, on that day G-d will be one and His name will be one" [Zecharia 14:9].

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

“**T**hese are the generations of Noah; Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with G-d." (Genesis 6:9)

"In his generations"-RASHI: "Some of our Rabbis explain it to his credit: (he was righteous even in his generation;) certainly if he was in a generation of righteous men he would have been even more righteous. And some explain it to his discredit: In HIS generation he was righteous. But if he had been in the

generation of Abraham he wouldn't have been considered anything."

Much has been discussed about this comment. Let us state first that the argument is not about the degree of Noah's righteousness. There is no argument about how righteous he was. He was what he was. The question is what the word "in his generations" means. Certainly it is a redundant word-when else would he be righteous, if not when he lived? What then does this word teach us? Was he righteous EVEN in his generation or was he righteous ONLY in his generation? Putting aside the merits of each side, we would ask: Why does Rashi change his language when he presents both views? On the credit side he says: "If he lived in a generation of righteous men he would be even more righteous." On the discredit side: "If he lived in the generation of Abraham, he wouldn't have been anything," and not, "he wouldn't have been this righteous."

Some answer that the next righteous man after Noah was Abraham. He came after Noah's generations. So the comparison was made with him. I would say that the meaning is this: Noah was righteous in a particular sense; he was "perfect with G-d." He wasn't a very social fellow, he had little to do with his peers. He wasn't particularly righteous with his fellowman. He didn't try to teach them to improve their ways, as Abraham did. Abraham put himself out for his contemporaries even though they were not righteous individuals. Only by comparing Noah to Abraham can we see what he was lacking in his righteousness. He was lacking the basic element of true righteousness, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Had he been in Abraham's generation "he wouldn't have been considered anything" because Abraham's love for mankind would have overshadowed Noah's insular-type righteousness.

True righteousness is to be true to your G-d and to be true to your fellow man. Our finest example is Abraham, not Noah. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha the Torah points out the danger of confusing unity with conformity. The generation of Terach, the father of Avraham, was ruled by a tyrant, Nimrod. It was the dor haflagah - the generation that ultimately divided itself into many different languages and cultures. That generation, fearful of another disastrous flood that would destroy it, resolved that by unifying all in executing a grand and all-encompassing project - the building of the great tower - it would be able to prevent divine punishment from striking it. Unity of people was necessary to even begin work on such a project.

So the world's peoples spoke only one language and spoke only of one way and one goal.

This unity, which at first glance always appears to be so desirable, soon sank into a cold, ruthless and murderous conformity. Big Brother Nimrod controlled everything and everybody and anyone who dared to express a dissenting opinion - such as Avraham - was immediately consigned to the furnace of destruction. Nimrod and the dor haflagah is representative of Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Kim's North Korea, the mullahs of Iran, Mugabe's Zimbabwe and all of the other dictatorial regimes that plague our planet. The drab conformity of imposed purpose, the stifling of the human spirit and the exploitation of the millions for the fulfillment of a cockeyed impractical ideal always lead to death, destruction and tragedy. The world needs many Avrahams and far fewer Nimrods.

The Jewish people also strive for a sense of unity. Over and over again we read and hear the exhortations for unity that flood our papers and media. But the Jewish people are blessed by its diversity of ideas and spirit. Though there are many in both the secular and religious world of Jewry who would impose conformity upon the rest of their fellow Jews if they could, the Jews are not built that way. Our unity of purpose is tied to Torah, the Land of Israel, helping each other when in need and attempting to be a moral force in the world. But there are different ways to achieve these goals and the vitality of Judaism lies in these different approaches. And, it is because of these different approaches that its inherent resistance to enforced conformity exists. I do not think that there is a greater diversity in any section of Jewry than the one that exists in the religious, observant sector. Yet, the Jews that compose this core section of Jewry, in spite of political and even ideological issues of significant difference, still retain a certain sense of unity of purpose, behavior and affinity one to another. The Lord broke the conformity of the world into many languages, cultures and approaches to wisdom and service. The Jewish people were formed out of twelve different tribes that many times disagreed with one another on tactics and approaches to life and national success. The lack of conformity in Jewish life should never be seen in purely negative terms. Our task is to preserve the basic unity of holy purpose amongst a nation of very diverse people, ideas and backgrounds. Not a small order, but one worthy of the children of Avraham. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah projects the glorious future of the Jewish people and describes the splendor of Jerusalem in breath-taking dimensions. In the

midst of this indescribable vision the prophet Yeshaya draws a striking comparison between our present exile and the flood in the time of Noach. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For a brief moment of anger I concealed My countenance from you but with everlasting kindness I will show My compassion. As with the waters of Noach about which I swore that they will never again flood the world so have I sworn never again to become angry with Israel." (54: 8, 9) The prophet assures the Jewish people that their painful years of exile will soon draw to a close never to be repeated. Drawing attention to the flood, he guarantees that, "As the world has never experienced a second flood so will the Jewish people never experience another exile." This peculiar equation between the flood and the Jewish people's exile suggests a strong association between the two. It appears that Hashem's unconditional guarantee to withhold a flood from this world serves as sound evidence to the eternal redemption of the Jewish people.

In order to appreciate this association, let us analyze Noach's role during the flood and Hashem's response to it. The Torah tells us in the beginning of our Sidra that the flood was sent because humanity turned totally inwards. The Torah states, "And the land was corrupt before Hashem and the land was full of robbery." (Breishis 6:11) All of mankind became focused on themselves-satisfying all of their personal pursuits without taking anyone else's privileges and rights into consideration. They regarded everyone and their possessions permissible to themselves in order to satisfy their personal interests and desires. Humanity was literally destroying itself with every person concerned only for himself, showing no care or respect for anyone else. During the months of the flood it became Noach's sole responsibility to restore morality to the world. The prevalent principles and policies in the Ark, Noach's world, had to be kindness and compassion. Every moment spent there had to be filled with caring and sharing. Hashem therefore charged Noach with the overwhelming responsibility of providing and tending to the needs of every living being in the Ark. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108B see Maharsha ad loc.) relates a conversation between Noach's son, Shem, and Eliezer wherein Shem stated that he never formally went to sleep throughout the twelve months he was in the Ark. Noach's family was totally preoccupied with their magnanimous chore of continuously following the varied feeding schedules of each living being. In this way, the family was totally involved in acts of kindness, providing for others every moment of their stay. This total reversal of priorities, placing their entire focus on the needs of others, reestablished the world. In fact, our Chazal in the Midrash (Breishis Rabba 33:4) understand this to be the single merit through which the floodwaters ended and Noach's family was permitted to leave the Ark and reenter the world.

Upon reentry, Noach immediately approached Hashem through sacrificial offerings and pleaded with Hashem never to repeat the devastating floodwaters. In this week's haftorah we discover that Hashem responded with an oath that a flood of those dimensions would never reoccur. Apparently, Noach's total dedication to kindness bore everlasting fruits and in response to Noach's kindness Hashem promised to shower His boundless kindness on the world. The Malbim (see commentary on Yeshaya 54:10) reflects that the nature of kindness distinguishes itself in regards to the recipient's worthiness. Unlike compassion and mercy which are governed by and fashioned according to the worthiness of the individual in need, kindness knows no bounds. In essence, one need not be worthy in order to qualify for Hashem's kindness. In view of this, the Malbim explains that a pledge of Hashem's kindness is, by definition, an eternal commitment. Throughout the era of the flood, Noach totally preoccupied himself with kindness and, in response, Hashem promised that throughout the era of this world He will preoccupy Himself with the world's kindness. This kindness translated into the unconditional guarantee that regardless how undeserving the world becomes it will never experience total destruction.

In view of this, Yeshaya draws our attention to this guarantee and states in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may jar and the hills may shift, but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never falter." (54:10) As we have seen regarding Noach's kindness, Hashem promises to respond to our kindness with a similar unconditional guarantee. This kindness means that Hashem will never respond to our shortcomings with expressions of anger. Irrespective of our behavior, never again will the Jewish people experience exile and other similar manifestations of Hashem's wrath. Once the Jewish people return to Eretz Yisroel, never again will Hashem remove His sacred presence from their midst. Hashem's kindness is eternal and after the Jewish people will receive His promise of kindness, it will be an unconditional and everlasting one.

This insight reveals to us the hidden message of Chazal and profoundly reflects upon the affluence of our generation. Chazal (see Rashi, Breishis 12:2) inform us of the character of the generation preceding Mashiach. They explain Hashem's introductory Bracha to Avrohom Avinu stated in the beginning of Lech Lecha in the following manner. There will be certain generations wherein Hashem's influence will be realized through our acts of kindness, others through our acts of devotion and sacrifice, and others through our commitment to Torah and truth. But in the era which precedes Mashiach the prevalent virtue will be kindness. (based on the reflections of HoRav HaGaon Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l) This particular era

distinguishes itself by being the launching pad for the era of Mashiach. This preceding era and its merits must secure the coming of Mashiach and all associated blessings. Amongst the blessings of Mashiach's times is Hashem's promise to shower us with His everlasting kindness, guaranteeing our eternal stay in Eretz Yisroel. But this commitment of everlasting kindness will only come in response to our selfless and personal commitment to unconditional kindness. This explains why never before has the opportunity of kindness availed itself to the Jewish people in such extraordinary proportions as in our days. Yes, with our generation accepting its responsibility and displaying of loving kindness we will deserve Hashem's unconditional response of His everlasting kindness. Yeshaya therefore points us to the flood and assures us that, as Hashem responded to Noach's kindness with His unconditional guarantee we should realize wholeheartedly that Hashem will also respond to our kindness with that same unconditional guarantee and shower His blessing upon His people for eternity.

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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Noach has G-d proclaiming Noach as being both a "Tzaddik" (righteous), and "Tamim" (perfect). What's tricky about that is that the term "Tzaddik" denotes a person that's been accused of something and has been proclaimed righteous, while the term "Tamim" describes a person that required no defense or exoneration. So which one was Noach?

In "Darash Moshe", Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that if you're an individual, working on yourself and no one else, your goal should be to perfect your actions and in using the guidelines of the Torah to achieve that perfection. However, if you're a leader, or in a position to influence others, many times that involves saying or doing things that can sometimes lead to allegations and accusations. For this reason, many people would rather stay away from communal affairs, and lead a quiet life. However, G-d told Noach and us that although Noach could have kept to himself and become perfect, He preferred that we stand up for the Torah even if it means facing opponents because of it. The biggest scholars of our past weren't known as Tamim, but as Tzaddikim (righteous people), because they stood for something! And the best way for us to achieve this goal is to find ONE Mitzvah (consult Kitzur for entire list of commandments) that we're willing to embrace and stand up for. By becoming a "mini-Tzaddik" in this one aspect, may we grow in rank, and one day become Tamim (perfect) Jews! *This Dvar is dedicated L'zacher Neshmas Reb Mordicia Mendel Ben Reb Zalmen Leib and Reb Benyomin Dovid Ben Yehuda Dov and for a Refuah Shelama for Tehila Malka Bas Rochel Fagia © 2005 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*