

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Where's Nachor? We know that Terach had three sons, Avra[ha]m, Nachor and Haran, (Beraishis 11:26), that Haran died in Ur Kasdim (11:28), and that Avraham left Ur Kasdim with Terach to go to Canaan (11:31). But what about Nachor? He is not mentioned among those who went with Terach to Charan, yet is in Charan when Avraham sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchok (24:10). If Nachor went with Terach, why wasn't he mentioned, and if he didn't, how did he get to Charan?

As can be expected, there are numerous approaches that deal with this. The Ramban (11:28) uses it as one of his arguments that Terach and Avraham were born in Charan, not in Ur Kasdim. When Terach left Charan (with Avraham) for Ur Kasdim, Nachor stayed behind, so was always there. Although this certainly addresses our issue, we would need to explain how Nachor married Haran's daughter, Milka (11:29) if he was in Charan while she was in Ur Kasdim (and is not included with those who went from Charan to Ur Kasdim). We also need to explain how Nachor got to Charan according to the vast majority of commentators that say that Avraham was originally from Ur Kasdim.

The Abarbanel suggests that Nachor (and Milka) went with Terach (and Avraham and Sara and Lot) to Charan, but were not mentioned because they weren't part of the reason for his leaving Ur Kasdim. [Haran's death indicated that, despite being his homeland, Ur Kasdim was not a healthy environment for him. Since Lot was Haran's son, Terach feared that it wouldn't be good for him either. Avraham and Sara not having children indicated that they needed a change of place as well, but Nachor and Milka had started their family already, so didn't need to leave and were therefore not a contributing factor in Terach leaving Ur Kasdim. It should be noted that others are of the opinion that Nachor didn't have children until after the akaydas (binding of) Yitzchok (see Radak on 11:26 and Yalkut Shimoni 766), but the Abarbanel is obviously among those that hold that they had children right away. The bottom line is that Nachor was not part of the reason Terach left Ur Kasdim, so was not mentioned.] The Nachalas Yaakov (11:28) also suggests that Nachor (and by extension, Milka) went

with Terach, but only those that continued on to Canaan with Avraham (Lot and Sara) were mentioned.

The Ibn Ezra (11:31) simply says that Nachor either left for Charan before Terach did, or came after he was already there. The Ran (quoted by the Abarbanel) says that Nachor stayed in Ur Kasdim because he had already established a family there, while Avraham, who had no children yet, was not fully separated from his father's house, and Lot was still fully dependant on his grandfather, so they all followed him. The Radak (11:31) and the Malbim (ibid) also say that Nachor stayed in Ur Kasdim when Terach left, without explaining how, or why, he eventually got to Charan.

The Mizrahi (12:2) says that after Avraham left Charan for Canaan, Nachor moved to Charan so that his father should not be alone. Avraham didn't (necessarily) know this, so his instructions to Eliezer were to go back to his family, who were probably still in Ur Kasdim. On the way, traveling through Charan (via the fertile crescent), when Eliezer learned that Nachor was there, he didn't need to go any further. However, the Torah calling Charan "Nachor's city" (24:10) and Eliezer praying to G-d when he arrived at the well in Charan to help him find a wife for Yitzchok there- even before being told that Nachor lives there (24:12-14) -- indicate that he (and therefore Avraham) already knew, even before starting the trip, that Nachor lived there. Nevertheless, this does not preclude Nachor from having stayed in Ur Kasdim after Terach and Avraham left, as when Avraham was informed after the akayda that Nachor had children (22:20-24), he might have also been told that he had moved to Charan. Beraishis Rabba (39:7) discusses Avraham's concern about leaving Terach behind (in Charan) when he moved to Canaan, so it is possible that Avraham sent a message to his brother in Ur Kasdim requesting that he move to Charan to take care of their father.

If we examine the chronology of events, we may come up with another possible explanation of how (and why) Nachor got from Ur Kasdim to Charan. Avraham was born in 1948 years after the creation of Adam, and moved to Canaan 75 years later (2023; see 12:4). He was certainly in Charan by the time he was 70 (2018), as it was then that he visited Canaan from Charan and the Bris Bain Habesarim ("Covenant Between the Pieces" described in 15:7-21) occurred (see Seder Olam Rabba 1). According to the Midrash Hagadol (11:31) this is when he left Ur Kasdim, while

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the Talmud (Avadoh Zara 9a, see Tos. there) indicates he was already making converts in Charan when he was 52 (2000), which is the year he left Ur Kasdim according to Sefer Hayashar and Seder Hadoros. In between, in the year 1996 (see Seder Olam Rabba 1), the tower of Bavel had stopped being built and civilization was "scattered over the face of the entire land" (11:8). Why were Avraham and Terach still there with King Nimrod? Terach was Nimrod's general, i.e. his right hand man (Sefer Hayashar; see also Me'am Lo'ez), so stayed even after the dispersion, while Avraham was, at the time of the dispersion, studying with Noach and Shem (ibid). It was after Avraham returned from his studies that they left Ur Kasdim, even though most of the rest of the world had left years prior. It is certainly possible that Nachor had moved to Charan along with the rest of the "Aramenians" who would make Aram their (new) home during the dispersion in 1996, at least four years prior to Terach leaving.

The only detail left to explain is the order of the verses (11:28-31), which indicate that Nachor married Milka after Haran died in the furnace but before Terach left Ur Kasdim. Although the common understanding is that they left right after Avraham confronted Nimrod, was thrown into the furnace and miraculously saved, and Haran died, these sources indicate that Avraham achieved celebrity status in Ur Kasdim, stayed for a few years (before Nimrod turned against him again), and successfully brought many close to G-d. During this time, it is quite possible that Nachor, who had been "dispersed" to Aram, paid his now-famous family a visit and married Milka-before returning home to Charan, to be joined there by his family a short time later. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

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“**C**ham said to his brothers, 'Adam had two sons, and one killed the other because of the inheritance of the world.'" (Rashi, 4:25)

Unfortunately, arguments within a family over inheritance continue to this day. Even within the halachic community, governed by the Torah's clear laws of inheritance (Bamidbar 27:7-11), families are

sometimes torn asunder by disputes, large and small financially, yet heated and protracted emotionally.

Sometimes, tragically, it is precisely a lack of appreciation of the Torah's laws which contribute to severe tensions in Orthodox families. The Torah provides that sons inherit their parents, while daughters inherit only if there are no sons. In a world of gender equality, this halacha can lead to resentment and worse by women who feel entitled to an equal share of the estate¹.

The double portion allotted by the Torah (Devarim 21:17) to a first-born son can cause jealousy and worse, especially in a world in which primogeniture is an anachronism. The special status of bechor is the theme of many quarrels, including murder and attempted murder, throughout Sefer Breishis (examples include Kayin (4:8), Yishmael (Rashi 21:4), Esav (27:41)). The unique position of a first-born son no longer exists in modern society. This leads to animosity over a bechor's double portion.

In the interests of peace within a family, a surviving spouse should arrange that his or her assets be divided equally among the children². However, according to most authorities, a typical last will and testament is halachically ineffective. One cannot bequeath property posthumously (Pischei Choshen 9:134). Nonetheless, one can indemnify himself to his daughters, a common practice six hundred years ago (see Maharil Siman 88). A conditional obligation (shtar chatzi zachar) was used to grant a daughter a half-share (Rama Choseh Mishpat 281:7)

A will should be written to avoid a fight among one's children (see Rama Choshen Mishpat 257:7). A will which calls for the Torah's exclusion of daughters leads to hatred and a split in the family (Gesher Hachaim p.42). Today, bequeathing equal shares to all children is the most likely way to avoid these terrible results.

Women who do not receive equal shares halachically may be tempted to secure them in secular court. This attempt constitutes a violation of the prohibition to litigate in secular court (Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 26:1), and, if successful, of theft of money which belongs to their brothers. This practice became so commonplace in the modern era that it led to the abandonment of the Rama's shtar chatzi-zachar (Maharsham 2:224:29, cited in Mishpat Hatzava'a p.164).

Recent authorities have called for the reinstatement of a note of indebtedness to make a will halachically effective (Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg, Techumin vol. 4, p. 350. Rav Feivel Cohen, Kuntras Midor Ledor. See Pischei Choshen, vol. 9, p. 168-175). The will should provide that a token portion of the estate, such as seforim, should be divided according to the Torah's laws (Techumin p. 349). Since the change from the Torah's law is achieved through an

indebtedness and not a bequest, it is permissible, just as one may transfer assets during his lifetime (see Nachlas Shiva 21:6). © 2007 by The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The deleterious effects of alcohol abuse are clearly evident in this week's parsha. Noach, after the trauma of the great flood and the destruction of his society and world, somehow drowns his sorrows in wine and becomes drunk and loses control over himself. From that incident, further tragedies, curses and disasters arise until it seems that the entire exercise of the flood seems to have been purposeless and irrelevant.

The scourge of alcohol related tragedies that was for many years almost unknown in the Jewish world is today commonplace in our society. Binge drinking by kippah-wearing youths is now an accepted way of life in the Diaspora and here in Israel as well. If one has any doubts about the effects of such behavior on family life, employment success and social interactions, let him spend five minutes speaking to Dr. Abraham Twerski. He will quickly disabuse (no pun intended) you of such a fanciful untrue notion. Automobile fatalities, broken families and homes and marriages, violent behavior and an attitude of uncontrolled hedonism all are products of the vineyard of Noach.

Because of this alarming situation in the Jewish world there are now synagogues that ban any form of liquor except for kiddush wine from being served or located on its premises. The excuses of Purim and Simchat Torah may have been valid for previous generations of sober minded Jews. In a generation of over indulgence and uncontrolled materialism, such as ours resembles, alcohol has become lethal to Jewish life, behavior and values.

There is a wonderfully true and pithy Yiddish aphorism that states: "What a sober person has on one's lung (controlled within) a drunken person has on one's tongue (exhibits in one's outside behavior.)" I knew Jews who when drunk on Purim would pour their hearts out to G-d and recite the entire Yom Kippur services by heart. Others who were great scholars would repeat countless sections of the Mishnah by pure memory.

When wine enters then the inner secrets of a person are revealed is certainly a correct assessment. Therefore I was mightily disturbed when on the night after Simchat Torah "religious" Jews who were visibly drunk went on a stone-throwing binge at passing cars here in Jerusalem. No matter what type of dress they wore on the outside, their true inner selves was revealed to be one of hatred, violence and vandalism. By such behavior, Jews can revert back to be Sons of Noach instead of Sons of Avraham.

I think that Noach's failure to realize the inevitable consequences of his drunkenness is one of the saddest narratives in the Torah. We will meet another incident of the dangers of an alcoholic binge in the story of Lot and his daughters. There too, as in the case of Noach, future generations of history are affected negatively by the drunken behavior of an ancestor.

I therefore think that the story of Noach in this week's parsha is most relevant to us and our times. To ignore that lesson is truly to place ourselves personally and society-wise in a very dangerous and unfortunate position. © 2007 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 ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

This week's Torah portion opens with the following statement: "Noah was an ISH (man) TZADDIK (righteous person) TAMIM (who was completely righteous)" (Genesis 6:9). The word ISH is a compliment in its own right, and the additional descriptions heap honor upon honor on Noah. No other personality is described with so many consecutive praises in one verse!

The first verse in the Book of Psalms teaches: "Fortunate is the man (ISH) who has not gone in the counsel of the wicked, and has not stood in the path of sinners, and has not sat in the company of scoffers." The Midrash Socher Tov, in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, comments that the phrase "Fortunate is the man (ISH)," refers to Noah, since Noah is called ISH, as in our parsha.

Why is Noah described as "fortunate"? According to the Midrash, Noah was fortunate in that he did not follow the ways of the three categories of people (wicked, sinners, scoffers) cited in Psalms. These three negative categories correspond to the three generations that arose in the world over the course of Noah's lifetime: the generation of Enosh (Adam's grandson, who initiated the practice of idolatry); the generation of the Flood (immersed in immoral behavior); and the generation of the dispersion (who built the Tower of Babel in order to wage war against G-d). It was Noah's good fortune that he did not go in the path of any of these three generations.

The Midrash teaches us that Noah spent his entire life surrounded by evil and wickedness, yet he managed to make himself into one of the most righteous people who ever lived. This is a remarkable feat. How is it possible for a person to maintain such a high level of spirituality while surrounded by an environment of depravity and corruption?

A passage from the Talmud will help us resolve this question. Ben Zoma says, "Who is a wise person? One who learns from everyone" (Avot 4:1). This is a strange statement. It seems reasonable for us to want to learn from righteous people-but what is wise about learning from the wicked?

The Berditchiver Rebbe remarks that righteous people are able to perceive positive qualities in even the most negative situations. From everything they encounter, they learn how to serve G-d better.

For example, if a righteous person were to witness someone passionately engaged in sinning, he would recognize and appreciate the tremendous motivating power of passion. However, instead of taking that power and using it to accomplish negative goals, the righteous person would redirect it for a meaningful purpose. The correct channeling of passion has the potential to change rote, sterile performance of G-d's mitzvot into mitzvah observance driven by enthusiasm and fire! (Kedushat Levi, end of Parshat Bereishit)

Noah epitomized this ability to channel negative forces toward a higher purpose. A hint to this idea is found in his name. The Torah tells us (Genesis 6:8) that Noah found *chen* (favor) in the eyes of G-d. The name NOAH (nun-chet), when reversed, spells CHEN (chet-nun)! Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d by mastering the art of reversal. He had the ability to redirect every energy from a negative goal to a positive one.

This is why a wise person learns from everyone. Instead of being corrupted by his evil generation, Noah used it as an opportunity for spiritual growth. He had the "best" teachers available! All Noah had to do was learn to take their ingenuity, arrogance, passion, jealousy and zeal, and use them in a productive, constructive way to get closer to G-d.

May we all learn how to transform the power of every energy and drive into positive action in order to become the best we can possibly be. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

As discussed in last week's portion, a thematic unity exists between Adam's individual and existential state of aloneness and the tragic social isolation which results from the Tower of Babel, when one universal language is replaced by seventy incomprehensible languages, creating in its wake bedlam, confusion, and dispersion.

In order to understand the sin of the Tower of Babel, we must remember that all social ills can be traced back to individual transgression; let us therefore return to G-d's declaration: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a help-opposite for him" (Gen. 2:18). Last week we discussed the significance of a help-

opposite ("ezer-kenegdo"), as well as the odd placement of the naming of the animals in the midst of Adam's search for his mate. Failing to find his help-opposite among the animals, a deep sleep falls upon Adam, "And He [G-d] took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place, and of the rib, which the Lord G-d had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21-22).

But why is the 'birth' of Eve surrounded with a mythic quality? Why does her creation differ radically from that of all other creatures?

In the question lies the answer. Had Eve been created from the earth like the rest of the animals, Adam would have related to her as a two-legged creature. Even if she walks and talks, she'd end up as one of the animals to name and control. Her unique 'birth' marks her unique role.

In an earlier verse, we read that "G-d created the human being in his image; in the image of G-d He created him, male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27). 'Male and female' suggests androgynous qualities, and on that verse Rashi cites the later reference to Eve's birth from Adam's 'rib,' quoting a midrashic interpretation that G-d originally created the human with two "faces", Siamese twins as it were, and when He puts Adam into a deep sleep, it's not to remove a rib, but to separate the female side from the male side.

According to Rashi, it seems that G-d's original human being was male and female. While Adam sleeps, G-d divides the creature into two so that each half will seek completion in the other. Had Eve not emerged from Adam's own flesh to begin with, they could never have become one flesh again.

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

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

(ad loc.) speaks of one flesh in allegoric terms: through a transcendent sexual act conceived in marriage, the two become one.

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

The entire sequence ends with the startling statement, "And they were both naked, and they were not ashamed" (12:25). Given the Torah's strict standards of modesty and sexuality, how are we to understand a description which seems to contradict traditional Jewish values?

I would suggest a more symbolic explanation. Nakedness without shame means that two people must have the ability to face each other and reveal their souls without external pretense. Usually, we play games, pretending to be what we're not, putting on a front. The Hebrew word 'begeg' (garment) comes from the same root as 'baG-d'-to betray. With garments I can betray, wearing my role as I hide my true self. The Torah wants husband and wife to remove garments which conceal truth, free to express fears and frustrations, not afraid to cry and scream in each other's presence without feeling the "shame of nakedness." This is the ideal 'ezer kenegdo,' each listening to and attempting to understand the thoughts and feelings of the other, each respecting and leaving room for other, working together in unity but not in conformity.

The first global catastrophe, the flood, struck when the world rejected the ideal relationship between man and woman. Rape, pillage, and unbridled lust became the norm, even among animals. Sex became an act of conquest rather than an expression of mutual giving and loving. Only one family on earth (Noah's) remained righteous. Now, with the Tower of

Babel, whatever values Noah tempted to pass on were again forgotten.

"And the entire earth had one language and uniform words" (Gen 11:1) So begins the Tower of Babel story. How and why the speakers of one language and uniform words turned into the scattered seventy nations speaking seventy languages is not clearly explained by the text, and problematically an earlier text describes that "different tribes and different peoples spoke their languages" (Gen. 10:5). Yet, metaphorically speaking, one language means people understand each other. If the message of ezer-kenegdo is remembered, it might mean that people can strive together for a united ideal even while they respect the unique quality in different people having different ways to reach the ultimate symphony of the many which produces the harmonic unity. "Uniform words" is a jarring note!

The Tower of Babel represents a new stage of depravity, not sexual but social. The united goal was to create a great name by building great towers, not for

the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of materialism; the new G-d became high-rise achievements with mortar and brick. As they reached greater physical heights, they completely forgot the human, inter-personal value of a friend, a wife, a life's partner. According to the Midrash, when a person fell off the Tower, work continued, but if a brick crashed the ground, people mourned. The picture is one of heartless, soul-less, communication-less Stalin totalitarianism.

Thus the total breakdown of language fits the crime of people, who may be physically able, but whose tongues and hearts are locked-people who are no longer communicating with each other. Existential loneliness engulfed the world and intercommunication a forgotten act. The powerful idea of one language became a vague memory.

The Tower of Babel ends a major period in the history of mankind, and the social destruction it leaves behind can only be fixed with Abraham; his message of a G-d of compassion who wishes to unite the world in love and morality is still waiting to be heard if humanity is to be saved. © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After leaving the ark, Noah becomes drunk and uncovers himself. (Genesis 9:21) His children, having witnessed this act, react in very different ways. Ham, together with his son, Canaan, appear to mock their father. In contrast, Shem and Yefet remain silent and modestly take a garment and cover their father's nakedness. (Genesis 9:22, 23) Here, the acts of Noah's children teach us a lot as they present different responses to being disappointed by someone dear-whether it be a fellow human being or even G-d.

Consider our relationship with G-d. At times we become disillusioned with G-d's ways. This may lead to doubting the Almighty. Sa'adia Gaon suggests that rather allowing the doubt to destroy our belief in G-d, we should isolate the uncertainty and try to learn from it. But, even if we can't make peace with that point of doubt, we should continue to believe. The challenge is to step back and consider the larger picture. We may feel that G-d has hurt us in certain ways, but when we pan back we are able to look and see how much G-d has given us.

Similarly, in human relationships. When a friend disappoints us-and there is no friendship without disappointment-we can opt to allow that particular feeling to destroy the larger relationship or we can bracket the falling out and try to learn from it. But even if the issue which caused the tension is not resolved, we have it within our power to take into account that person's goodness, realize that every one of us has certain flaws and move on with the friendship.

So, too, in our narrative. After providing heroically for his family for the entire time of the flood, Noah fails—he becomes drunk. The reaction of Ham and Canaan was to allow this mistake to destroy their entire relationship with their father.

Not so with Shem and Yefet. No doubt their father had become drunk. But they did not focus in exclusively on that failure. They took into account their father's whole personality. Hence, they cover up his nakedness, symbolizing their readiness to isolate the wrong and learn from it, even as they continue to love and respect their father.

Since we are not perfect, we cannot expect perfection from others. No relationship will be without some disappointment. As we tolerate our failings, so too should we learn to tolerate the failings of others. Interestingly, one of the words for beloved - whether referring to G-d or another human being - is re'ah, from the word ra, which means "evil." The test of a relationship is what happens when a disappointment sets in, when something ra occurs.

Shem and Yefet teach that in a genuine and deep relationship, one can acknowledge disappointment, while at the same time, not allowing a falling out to sweepingly destroy the bond of friendship, commitment, growth and love. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After Noach leaves the ark and offers sacrifices on an altar, we are told by the Torah that the Almighty decided that the phenomenon of the flood will never be repeated again: "And G-d said within His heart, I will not curse the land again because of man, because his inclination is evil from the time of his youth. And I will not strike all the living creatures as I did." [Bereishit 8:21]. These verses do not clearly explain why G-d made this decision. Some commentators have explained that the reason is given in the text itself? "because his inclination is evil from the time of his youth." That is, the fact that the Almighty recognized this character trait of man was the reason for His mercy after the flood. However, this is hard to accept, since it is explicitly stated before the flood that G-d recognized this trait of man, and in fact this is what brought on G-d's decision to have a flood. In fact, the wording is similar to what appears in this week's Torah portion: "And G-d saw that man's evil was great on the earth, and that all the desire of his heart was only evil all day long. And G-d regretted that He had created man on the earth, and He was sad in His heart. And G-d said, I will eradicate mankind which I created from

the face of the earth." [6:5-7]. This implies that the verse in this week's portion should be understood as follows: "I will not curse the land again because of man (even though it would be right to do so), because his inclination is evil from the time of his youth." But this then brings us back to our original question: Why did the Almighty decide never to have another flood?

Evidently the decision stems from what preceded the verse we are discussing: "And Noach build an altar for G-d, and he took from all the pure animals and from all the pure birds and offered them as Olah sacrifices on the altar. And G-d smelled the pleasant odor, and He said within his heart, I will not curse the land again because of man..." [8:20-21]. However, this explanation leads to another question, which the Talmud worded as follows: "Rabbi Chanina said, Anybody who is enticed by his own wine is similar to the way that his Creator acts, as is written, 'And G-d smelled the pleasant odor'" [Eiruvim 65b]. Is that what happened, that the Almighty "was enticed" by the pleasant odor of the sacrifices and therefore decided never to bring another flood on the earth?

Evidently the establishment of the first altar in history was a significant step, symbolically expressed by the description of a "pleasant odor." This step stands out in comparison to the first step taken by Adam in the earlier world which was destroyed. Just as Noach, so Adam and Chavah were alone in the world, together with the animals and the birds. But Adam and Chavah took what was forbidden to them for their own use? "And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat... and she took from its fruit and ate it, and she also gave it to her husband together with her, and he ate" [3:6]. Noach, on the other hand, took from his "own" possessions and "gave" them to G-d? "And Noach built an altar for G-d, and he took from all the pure animals... and offered them as Olah sacrifices." This act of giving is especially important in that the type of sacrifice was an Olah, all of which is given exclusively to G-d, without anything left over for man's use. Thus, Noach left the ark in a positive way, and his first step indeed created a "pleasant odor" for G-d. His sacrifices were what influenced G-d to declare that He would never again curse the world as He had done.

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

“And as for Me-Behold I am about to bring the floodwaters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which there is a breath of life under the heavens; everything that is in the earth shall expire." (Genesis 6:17)

The prophet Isaiah (54:9) refers to the Flood as mei Noach—the waters of Noah—thereby implying that Noah bears at least partial responsibility for the Flood. Sforno suggests that Noah's failure lay in failing to teach his generation to know G-d and to walk in His

ways. Had he taught them to know G-d, they would surely have repented.

We can explain this Sforno as follows. The Midrash comments on the phrase, "the path (derech erez) to the Tree of Life," that derech erez is middos, proper character traits. Middos are the paths that lead to the Tree of Life, the Torah. Hence, "Derech erez precedes Torah." First one refines his middos, and only then can the Torah dwell within him. The Torah cannot reside in one who does not possess good middos: "Where there is no derech erez, there is no Torah." (see Rabbeinu Yona to Pirkei Avos 3:22) Even though only Torah can bring one's middos to ultimate perfection, where there is no foundation of proper middos, the acquisition of Torah is impossible.

Rabbeinu Yona's categorical negation of the possibility of Torah residing in one who lacks good middos can be understood in two ways, both true. The first is that a person's lack of good middos makes ultimate retention of his Torah knowledge-no matter how great-impossible, because his lack of middos prevents the Torah from fully meshing with the essence of his soul. Hence when he leaves this world, the Torah will not accompany him, but be left behind with his other external physical components.

An alternative explanation is that even in this world the Torah will not remain with him. This idea can be illustrated with the following anecdote. Maimonides had a dispute with a philosopher whether instinct or training is the decisive factor in animal behavior. To prove the efficacy of training, the philosopher taught cats to stand erect, balance trays and serve as waiters. He dressed them for the part and conducted a banquet with the cats as the waiters. Maimonides countered his proof by releasing some mice at the banquet. The cats, forgetting all their training, let the trays and dishes crash to the ground as they rushed about on all fours in pursuit of the mice.

Human beings also have their baser instincts and desires that, without training, drag them onto all fours. A human being is distinct from the animals, however, by virtue of his ability to perfect his middos so that they control his baser instincts. One who has not worked on perfecting his middos will, like the trained cat, be able to put on a show of Torah discipline for a time, but only so long as no "mice" are released in his path. A Torah scholar, says Maimonides, is one who has mastered good character traits. Since he has perfected his character, his sins are by their very nature incidental, not symptomatic of basic character flaws. Therefore we are told that if we see a righteous person sin at night, we should assume that by the next day he has repented. Because the sin did not flow from an intrinsic character flaw, he certainly recognized the need to repent in the interim.

Rabbi Chaim Vital explains that middos were not enumerated in the Torah among the Mitzvos

because they are the very foundation of all Mitzvos and the Torah itself. It is in his ability to emulate the perfect character traits attributed to G-d that man is in the image of G-d. One who lacks proper character is therefore deficient in the very essence of humanity.

The Alter from Kelm once remarked that Darwin was able to formulate his theory of evolution only because he had never seen a real human being. Thus he could view men as no more than smarter monkeys. "Had he seen my teacher, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who developed his character traits to a degree of perfection that fully expressed the essence of the Divine Image, he never could have entertained the possibility that human beings evolved from monkeys," said the Alter.

Darwin's peers were surely socially respectable people, but with regard to true character development, they remained mere trained cats, whose instinctive desires could at any moment bring them down on all fours.

The sins of immorality and robbery of the generation of the Flood were merely symptoms of the underlying disease of deficient character development. Noah attacked the symptom, but failed to cure the disease. He did not teach them to know G-d through contemplation of His middos and to walk in His ways by correcting and developing their own character traits. Hence he was unsuccessful. His rebuke may occasionally have suppressed the symptoms, but they soon reappeared, since the underlying cause had not been treated. Without changing their underlying character, no true repentance was possible.

The Torah describes the generation of the Flood as "rabbas ro'as ha'adam." This can be translated to mean the evil they perpetrated was beyond the boundaries of adam-of human beings. They corrupted the very essence of their humanity, their middos. Hence, the Midrash says, they were punished measure for measure with the overflowing of the great deep. They destroyed their natural humanity, and therefore the natural order was abrogated and the waters of the deep breached their boundaries and inundated the world. Likewise, the result of the Flood was literally to dissolve their human forms-an external manifestation of their inner spiritual decay.

The mystical works explain that the colors of the rainbow are representations of G-d's middos (attributes). Thus, the rainbow is the symbol of G-d's promise not to bring another flood, for by reflecting on and emulating G-d's middos, we ensure that another flood will not be necessary.

Only after the Flood did G-d permit the consumption of meat. Sefer Halkrim explains that mankind, prior to the Flood, equated animal life with human life; man was, in their eyes, reduced to but a glorified and more developed animal. To counter this tragic mistake, G-d permitted mankind to eat meat. He

thereby demonstrated that there is an essential qualitative difference between people and animals that gives us the right to kill them for food. That essential difference is inherent in man's ability to develop and emulate the middos of his Creator.

Unlike Noah, Abraham was able to influence the people of his generation precisely because he concentrated on teaching middos. He was thus able to remedy the disease and not just the symptoms. At the age of three, Abraham knew that there was a G-d, but not until 40, says Maimonides, could he be described as "knowing his Creator," i.e. as recognizing G-d through the comprehension of His middos and their emulation. Only then did Abraham begin to teach his generation. By teaching middos, he succeeded in breaking the idols. He convinced his contemporaries to abandon G-ds made in their image for the service of the true G-d.

G-d explains His choice of Abraham as the progenitor of the Jewish people: "For I know that he will command his children and household after him that they will keep G-d's way, doing charity and justice." (Genesis 18:19).

G-d knew that Abraham would direct his descendants in derech Hashem- the path of middos that leads to the Tree of Life, Torah. That is why we, Abraham's descendants, were worthy of eventually receiving the Torah. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Tire of Babel

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

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

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

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

It is puzzling: how does a problem such as lack of communication stop a lofty project of such tremendous scope?

Didn't the French and British jointly finish the Chunnel, the tunnel that connects the two countries, under the English Channel?

I once asked my rebbe, Reb Mendel Kaplan, who escaped from the Nazi inferno to Shanghai, China where he lived for nearly five years, how he was able to communicate with the Chinese. He held up a dollar. "Everybody understands this language," he said.

Don't people of different languages manage to communicate when they want to realize a noteworthy mission? Why was there no way to gather the forces, create new communication techniques, and continue the project? A college professor was known to give difficult tests yet he had a very lenient policy. If a student missed the exam he could take a make-up test the next day. The make-up, however, was always the same test the professor had given the day prior.

15 minutes before a particularly difficult final exam, the professor received a phone call. The four voices crowding the phone booth sounded desperate.

"Professor, we were on our way to take your final and we got a flat tire.

Please let us take a make-up exam tomorrow."

"Certainly," the professor responded.

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

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

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

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

When our common goals are enveloped in common good, then we can unite under the most difficult of circumstances. However, if our motivations are selfish, the slightest impediment will leave our entire project and mission flat. As flat as the tire of Babel. © 1996 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

