

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**fter Noach came out of the ark, he built an altar to G-d and brought offerings upon it that pleased G-d, with G-d promising to never again wipe out all living things (Beraishis 8:20-21). Why would G-d refrain from bringing another flood (or other disaster) even if the same level of sin was repeated? "For the formation(s) of man's heart are evil from his youth" (8:21). Yet, the reason given for G-d bringing the flood (6:5) was "because all the formations of the thoughts of his heart were only evil." How can the same thing (the formation of evil thoughts in man's heart) be both the reason why life was destroyed and the reason why life would never be destroyed again? Or as Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch put it (as translated by Daniel Haberman), "this same sentence appears above (6:5), where it provides the reason for the punishment. Is it not absurd, then, to suggest that here it provides the reason for clemency?"

It should first be noted that this apparent contradiction is not based on a literal translation of the two verses, but on their implication. The cause of the flood was "all of the formations of man's heart" being "only evil, all day long;" there was no hope of things ever improving. There is no mention that the "formations of man's heart" were "evil since his youth" either because it would be irrelevant to the level of sin already reached or because only after the flood were they "from his youth." There is no mention that G-d would not destroy the world even if these "evil formations" were the only types of thoughts the heart formed, but promising not to destroy the world without listing any exceptions implies it won't be destroyed even if mankind sinks to the same level again.

Because of this seeming contradiction (and other factors) Rav Hirsch explains the verse in a way he acknowledges is different from the traditional commentators (who have, in his words, "misinterpreted the verse"). Rather than the word "ki" meaning "because," followed by the reason G-d will not bring another flood-like catastrophe, he understands "ki" to mean "if," so that the verse reads "[even] if the formations of the hearts of the young," who normally would not yet have internalized evil, "are evil," and the future looks bleak, "I [G-d] will [nevertheless] not smite all living things as I have done." (This is how it would

read based on his commentary; because of how the verse is structured, the translation based on his commentary reads slightly differently.) Ibn Janach has a similar approach, telling us that one of the places the word "ki" means "even though" is our verse;

"even though the formations of man's heart are evil from his youth, I [G-d] will not destroy the world again. Accordingly, the Torah is not addressing why there will not be a similar punishment even if man reaches a similar level of sin, only relating G-d's promise that (for whatever reason) He won't.

Another approach (see Malbim and Kli Yakar) understands the word "ki" to mean "but," or "only." Until now there were two causes leading man to sin; the land, whose strength made it easier for man to lean towards the physical over the spiritual, and man's evil inclination. For this reason, G-d also "cursed the land," i.e. weakened it, during the flood. Once weakened, there would no longer be a need to "curse the land again," and the only factor causing man to sin was his evil inclination. With half of the causes of sin eliminated, G-d would no longer need to destroy all life, even if mankind sunk to the same low level again.

Sefornu also says the effect of the flood altered the circumstances; before the flood, the intellect was at its full strength right away, so falling to the point of having only evil thoughts was cause for starting from scratch. After the flood, however, the intellect was not as strong right away, while the evil inclination is present "from his youth," thus providing a reason to cut mankind some slack. Ralbag takes the opposite approach, telling us that before the flood mankind had lost its way, with no hope of recovering, while after the flood, Noach and his family would ensure that this never happened again. [He doesn't explain how Noach could accomplish what Adam (or Mesushelach, or anyone else) couldn't or didn't; perhaps having the ability to reference what happened (the flood) would help them be more effective.] According to Ralbag, man's evil inclination is a mitigating factor, and a reason not to destroy life, at least until the evil reaches the point where it's not a matter of punishment but of having to start over, a point that wouldn't be reached again.

Rav Eliyahu Dessler z"l (Michtav MeiEliyahu II, pgs. 138-141) quotes Rav Chayim Volozhin (in a note on Nefesh HaChayim 1:6) regarding Adam's sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Before the sin, Adam had no internal "evil;" it was purely an external temptation. Although I am oversimplifying it, the gist of

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his approach is that Adam thought that he would be serving G-d on a higher level if he did so despite have an internal battle of good vs. evil; resisting temptation that is only external is not as great an accomplishment. (He was wrong because G-d had explicitly commanded him not to eat from the forbidden fruit.) In other words, at least for Adam, it could not be said that his heart formed evil thoughts "from his youth" because that only started after he sinned. I would suggest that after choosing to internalize evil, Adam's main job, for the rest of his life, was to expunge that evil from within him. Man was given hundreds of years to live, as this was really hard to accomplish. Each subsequent generation had the same task, and they were each given hundreds of years to try to accomplish it, but instead of steadily minimizing the evil within them (by choosing the spiritual or intellectual over the physical), they added to it, to the point that by Noach's time, evil was the only thing they thought of. This mission was not accomplished, so a new mission had to be drawn up.

After the flood, even if the goal of the individual was still to minimize the physical and maximize the spiritual/intellectual, mankind's mission changed from trying to minimize the physical to using the physical to help the spiritual/intellectual. After Noach brought animal offerings, using physical things to foster spiritual growth, G-d promised not to destroy the world again; they were no longer expected to eradicate the internal physical drives, but to channel it towards positive things instead. G-d wouldn't curse the earth again, because now it would be a tool for serving G-d rather than a hindrance to it. Whereas before the flood having an evil inclination was mankind's own doing (so could not be considered a mitigating factor), the new, post-flood beginning included having an evil inclination from the outset; a factor that not only mitigated succumbing to it, but was necessary if we are to turn the physical into a means of divine service. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**B**etween the Flood and the call to Abraham, between the universal covenant with Noah and the particular covenant with one people, comes the strange, suggestive story of Babel: "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As

men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'" [Gen. 11:1-4]

What I want to explore here is not simply the story of Babel considered in itself, but the larger theme. For what we have here is the second act in a four act drama that is unmistakably one of the connecting threads of Bereishit, the Book of Beginnings. It is a sustained polemic against the city and all that went with it in the ancient world. The city-it seems to say-is not where we find G-d.

The first act begins with the first two human children. Cain and Abel both bring offerings to G-d. G-d accepts Abel's, not Cain's. Cain in anger murders Abel. G-d confronts him with his guilt: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Abel's punishment was to be a "restless wanderer on the earth." Cain then "went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden." We then read: "And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch: and he [Cain] built a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch." [Gen. 4:17]

The first city was founded by the first murderer, the first fratricide. The city was born in blood.

There is an obvious parallel in the story of the founding of Rome by Romulus who killed his brother Remus, but there the parallel ends. The Rome story- of children fathered by one of the gods, left to die by their uncle, and brought up by wolves-is a typical founding myth, a legend told to explain the origins of a particular city, usually involving a hero, bloodshed, and the overturning of an established order. The story of Cain is not as founding myth because the Bible is not interested in Cain's city, nor does it valorise acts of violence. It is the opposite of a founding myth. It is a critique of cities as such. The most important fact about the first city, according to the Bible, is that it was built in defiance of G-d's will. Cain was sentenced to a life of wandering, but instead he built a town.

The third act, more dramatic because more detailed, is Sodom, the largest or most prominent of the cities of the plain in the Jordan valley. It is there that Lot, Abraham's nephew, makes his home. The first time we are introduced to it, in Genesis 13, is when there is a quarrel between Abraham's herdsmen and those of Lot. Abraham suggests that they separate. Lot sees the affluence of the Jordan plain. It was "well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt," (Gen. 13:10). He decides to live there. Immediately we are told that "the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord"-given the choice between affluence and virtue, Lot chooses affluence.

Five chapters later comes the great scene in which G-d announces his plan to destroy the city, and Abraham challenges him. Perhaps there are fifty innocent people there, perhaps just ten. How can G-d destroy the whole city? "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" G-d agrees: if there are ten innocent people, He will not destroy the city.

In the next chapter, we see two of the three angels that had visited Abraham, arrive at Lot's house in Sodom. Shortly thereafter, a terrible scene plays itself out: "Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom-both young and old-surrounded the house. They called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.'" (Gen. 19:4-5)

It turns out that there are no innocent men. Three times-"all the men," "from every part of the city," "young and old"-the text emphasises that everyone was involved as would-be perpetrators of the crime.

A cumulative picture is emerging. The people of Sodom do not like strangers. They do not see them as protected by law-nor even by the conventions of hospitality. There is a clear suggestion of sexual depravity and potential violence. There is also the idea of a crowd, a mob. People in a crowd can commit crimes they would not dream of doing on their own. The sheer population density of cities is a moral hazard in and of itself. Crowds drag down more often than they lift up. Hence Abraham's decision to live apart. He wages war on behalf of Sodom (Gen. 14) and prays for its inhabitants, but he will not live there. Not by accident were the patriarchs and matriarchs not city dwellers.

The fourth scene is, of course, Egypt, where Joseph is brought as a slave and serves in Potiphar's house. There, Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce him, and failing, accuses him of a crime he did not commit, for which he is sent to prison. The descriptions of Egypt in Genesis, unlike those in Exodus, do not speak of violence but, as the Joseph story makes pointedly clear, there is sexual license and injustice.

It is in this context that we should understand the story of Babel. It is rooted in a real history, an actual time and place. Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, was known for its city states, one of which was Ur, from which Abraham and his family came, and the greatest of which was indeed Babylon. The Torah accurately describes the technological breakthrough that allowed the cities to be built: bricks hardened by being heated in a kiln.

Likewise the idea of a tower that "reaches to heaven" describes an actual phenomenon, the ziqqurat or sacred tower that dominated the skyline of the cities of the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley. The ziqqurat was an artificial holy mountain, where the king interceded with the gods. The one at Babylon to which our story refers was one of the greatest, comprising seven stories, over three hundred feet high, and described in

many non-Israelite ancient texts as "reaching" or "rivalling" the heavens.

Unlike the other three city stories, the builders of Babel commit no obvious sin. In this instance the Torah is much more subtle. Recall what the builders said: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." [Gen. 11:4]

There are three elements here that the Torah sees as misguided. One is "that we make a name for ourselves." Names are something we are given. We do not make them for ourselves. There is a suggestion here that in the great city cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, people were actually worshipping a symbolic embodiment of themselves. Emil Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, took the same view. The function of religion, he believed, is to hold the group together, and the objects of worship are collective representations of the group. That is what the Torah sees as a form of idolatry.

The second mistake lay in wanting to make "a tower that reaches to the heavens." One of the basic themes of the creation narrative in Bereishit 1 is the separation of realms. There is a sacred order. There is heaven and there is earth and the two must be kept distinct. "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth He has given to the children of men" (Ps. 115:16).

The Torah gives its own etymology for the word Babel, which literally meant "the gate of G-d." The Torah relates it to the Hebrew root b-l-l, meaning "to confuse." In the story, this refers to the confusion of languages that happens as a result of the hubris of the builders. But b-l-l also means "to mix, intermingle," and this is what the Babylonians are deemed guilty of: mixing heaven and earth, that should always be kept separate. B-l-l is the opposite of b-d-l, the key verb of Bereishit 1, meaning "to distinguish, separate, keep distinct and apart."

The third mistake was the builders' desire not to be "scattered over the face of the whole earth." In this they were attempting to frustrate G-d's command to Adam and later to Noah to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). This seems to be a generalised opposition to cities as such. There is no need, the Torah seems to be saying, for you to concentrate in urban environments. The patriarchs were shepherds. They moved from place to place. They lived in tents. They spent much of their time alone, far from the noise of the city, where they could be in communion with G-d.

So we have in Bereishit a tale of four cities: Enoch, Babel, Sodom and "Egypt." This is not a minor theme but a major one. What the Torah is telling us, implicitly, is how and why Abrahamic monotheism was born.

Hunter/gatherer societies were relatively egalitarian. It was only with the birth of agriculture and the division of labour, of trade and trading centres and economic surplus and marked inequalities of wealth, concentrated in cities with their distinctive hierarchies of power, that a whole cluster of phenomena began to appear-not just the benefits of civilization but the downside also.

This is how polytheism was born, as the heavenly justification of hierarchy on earth. It is how rulers came to be seen as semi-divine-another instance of b-l-l, the blurring of boundaries. It is where what mattered were wealth and power, where human beings were considered in the mass rather than as individuals. It is where whole groups were enslaved to build monumental architecture. Babel, in this respect, is the forerunner of the Egypt of the Pharaohs that we will encounter many chapters and centuries later.

The city is, in short, a dehumanizing environment and potentially a place where people worship symbolic representations of themselves.

Tenakh is not opposed to cities as such. Their anti-type is Jerusalem, home of the Divine presence. But that, at this stage of history, lies long in the future.

Perhaps the most relevant distinction for us today is the one made by the sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Community is marked by face-to-face relationships in which people know, and accept responsibility for, one another. Society, in Tonnies' analysis, is an impersonal environment where people come together for individual gain, but remain essentially strangers to one another.

In a sense, the Torah project is to sustain *Gemeinschaft*-strong face-to-face communities-even within cities. For it is only when we relate to one another as persons, as individuals bound together in shared covenant, that we avoid the sins of the city, which are today what they always were: sexual license, the worship of the false gods of wealth and power, the treatment of people as commodities, and the idea that some people are worth more than others.

That is Babel, then and now, and the result is confusion and the fracturing of the human family.  
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**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**N**oah was a righteous person; he was whole-hearted in his generations; Noah walked with G-d" (Genesis 6:9).

With these laudatory comments the Bible introduces us to Noah. However, if indeed Noah was such a great man why was he not chosen to be the founding father of Israel? Why must we wait ten generations for Abraham to come on the scene? And why does Rashi, the classic Biblical commentator who

always seeks to unearth positive personality traits, quote the passage from the Talmud informing us that there were sages who interpreted this introductory verse to Noah's detriment, namely "that he was only righteous in his generation - had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered significant at all?" (B.T. Sanhedrin 108a).

I believe that a careful analysis of the Biblical story of Noah - as well as a comparison with Abraham's life - will answer our question and teach us profound lessons about what the Bible really expects from us, the descendants of Abraham.

Our Biblical text repeats the assertion that Noah was righteous - a *tzadik* - as justification for the fact that he and his family were chosen to enter the ark and so to be spared from the Flood - because "You alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation" (Gen. 7:1). Ten generations later, when the Bible is explaining the reason for Abraham's Divine election and his call to found the nation through which all the nations of the earth will be blessed, a slightly different term is used: "Because I have known him in order that he may command his children and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord; to do charity (*tzedaka*) and justice." What is the difference between Noah, the *tzadik*, who did acts of *tzedek*, righteousness, and Abraham, the first Jew, who was a person of *tzedaka*, charity (as translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan), which is apparently preferable to *tzedek*?

When the Bible first instructs us to lend money to the poor (Exodus 22:24-27), it warns us not to take interest and stresses that if the lender has taken a garment as security for the loan, he must return it to the borrower before sunset. "For this clothing for his skin may be his only covering. In what else shall he sleep? And if he will cry out to me (because he is cold in the night), I will hear him, because I am compassionate" (ibid. 25, 26). When this commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy (24:10-14), the Bible adds, "Return it to him at sunset, so that he will be able to sleep in his garment and bless you; for you, this will be considered as an act of charity (*tzedaka*) before the Lord your G-d." Our Talmudic sages rule that until the borrower repays his debt, the lender actually owns the pledge, so strict justice would imply that he does not need to return it for the night. But the Bible expects more: it expects the lender to reach out to the borrower with compassion, to go beyond the requirements of righteousness and to act charitably (giving what is rightfully yours to someone else who needs it).

Noah was a *tzadik*, a person of righteousness; he was not a doer of *tzedaka*, a person of compassion. Noah deserved to be saved, whereas the other inhabitants of the world did not, which is why Noah built an ark for himself and his family in accordance with G-d's instructions, but never pleaded with G-d on behalf of the rest of humanity. When, however, G-d informed Abraham that because of their heinous crimes Sodom

and Gomorrah were about to be destroyed, Abraham argued with G-d, pleaded with the Almighty even on behalf of the evil people. G-d wants a covenantal people that will reach out in compassion to the entire world; that will be "a sacred nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers"; that will even strive and argue with Him, choosing the ways of loving compassion over the path of strict righteousness.

Noah was righteous for himself, holding everyone to his own strict standards. In this, he was a precursor of Jonah, who fled from the G-d of repentance and forgiveness, the G-d of Nineveh and the G-d of the world. Abraham was the father of Moses, who was willing to be removed from the Book of Books and the Book of Life in order to "force" G-d to forgive a sinning Israel, and the father of Isaiah, who dreamt of a house of G-d that would be a house of prayer for all nations - in a world where every human would live in peace and security. It is no wonder, then, that, when compared to Abraham, Noah is found wanting. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he Torah's recitation of the events of the great flood and of Noach's ark is well known to all of us, no matter our position on the religious spectrum of Jewish life. In reviewing human history since that time, it seems pretty accurate that we are always somehow perched on the precipice of a great cataclysmic event of horrendous consequences, whether man made, natural, or of climatic making.

In our time we are faced with recurring natural disasters that have taken hundreds of thousands of lives. We are faced with the threat of nuclear wars and untold destruction and with economic crises that sap the vitality of societies, nations and individuals.

The motto of King Louis of France *après moi deluge* - after me comes the flood - is an apt assessment of how the majority of humankind thinks today. There is very little optimism to go around. The messengers of hope and change are not very convincing in their words and certainly not in their deeds and policies. So, there is an overall malaise that besets us.

There are no big dreams or bold policies broadcast, little acceptance of risk and few visions of what can and should be accomplished. The great ideals and movements that marked the beginning of the twentieth century are now all shattered idols. Political rhetoric has lost all believability and the "kabbalist" soothsayers and human rights activists are, in the main, imposters. We pray for rain but are fearful of the flood.

Enter the ark. The ark symbolizes not only the salvation of one person and his family from the ravages of the flood but, more importantly, it symbolizes the ability to rise above our fears and innate pessimism and

to salvage the purpose of our lives from negativism and nihilism.

As a reinforcement of this idea of an ark of salvation, there is also the natural phenomenon of the rainbow which represents an eternal covenant between humankind and the Creator that the flood will not recur. This rainbow is not to be misinterpreted or its impact to be exaggerated.

We have no guarantees against recurring disasters, natural and man made, of wars and strife, but we do have a promise that somehow human life will continue. It is incumbent upon us to make that life productive, meaningful and, in a true sense, eternal as well. The ark was and is the will of humankind to not only survive the omnipresent threat of the flood, but to somehow overcome its dangers. It is an attempt to reinforce the rainbow and not be distracted by the false messages of unrealistic hopes and, conversely, the prophets of impending doom.

Every generation is charged with the task of building an ark for itself. It is also instructed to teach the message of the rainbow to the next generation and to implant belief, tradition, values and a concern for others into the lives of those that will follow us here on earth.

All of this is true for humankind generally. And, it certainly is true for the Jewish people particularly. Israel, world Jewry generally, finds itself hemmed in by enemies and beset by great problems. We are the only people targeted openly by others and constantly threatened with 'the great flood'. The world apparently is unaware that the fate of all is tied inextricably to the fate of the Jews.

One would have thought that the story of the twentieth century and its horrendous events would have made this lesson crystal clear. Obviously this is not the case. But we Jews have to continue building our ark. This little, seemingly flimsy ark has withstood all of the floods that time has thrown against us. We should revitalize ourselves, dream great dreams again, and see the great picture. We must not concentrate so much on the picayune details which so blind us to our accomplishments and goals.

We have to rebuild ourselves anew without discarding the treasures of our past. G-d promised the Jewish people a new heart and the ability to rise to all challenges. And, above all, we must educate our generation and future generations to observe the rainbow reflected in the Torah, and to pass on our teachings and our traditions.

Jewish ignorance, hedonism and the worshipping of false idols, all of which mask themselves as being the greater good, are the real floods that threaten our future existence and success. The rainbow teaches us that our ark is waterproof - and those generations and individuals wise enough to enter that ark will surely succeed in avoiding all future disasters © 2010 *Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs,*

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**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**his week's portion describes the famous story in Genesis of the great deluge that destroyed the earth. Why must the narrative tell us about the flood in such great detail? The Torah, very simply, could have told us that the world had turned to evil and that G-d had no other choice but to destroy all living things. Several answers come to mind.

When thinking about the deluge most of us conjure up an image of a G-d who is vengeful seeking to punish with great brutality the entire world. But the extent of the narrative indicates a very different message. Far from G-d being a G-d of retribution, the length of the descriptions teaches that G-d is a G-d of compassion who actually hesitated to destroy the world. Thus Nehama Leibowitz divides the section prior to the flood into six paragraphs. The tedious discussion of what G-d goes through before allowing the waters to come down reveals a G-d who waits until the last instant to eradicate the world - hoping against hope that humankind would repent. Indeed, on the morning of the flood, the Torah says, "and rain (not a flood) was upon the earth." (7:12) Rashi tells us that the great flood began as only rain because, even at the last moment, if humanity would have repented G-d would have turned the waters into a rain of blessing.

It is noteworthy that there is a similar phenomenon that takes place in the narrative describing Noach's exit from the ark. The detailed and deliberate style may indicate an uncertainty on the part of Noach. Having experienced "the deluge," Noach hesitated to start over, wondering and worrying why he should exit and start the world anew. After all, more destruction could be around the corner. Note that G-d commands Noach to leave the ark with his wife so that he could cohabit and continue to live as a family. Noach, however, exits with his sons, while his wife leaves with their daughters-in-law as they could not fathom living together as husband and wife and continuing the human race. (Genesis 8:16,18)

One other thought. Maybe the flood narrative is extended to parallel the Genesis story, which is actually extremely similar to ours. Just as the world started with water, so too did water flood the earth. Just as G-d first created light, so too the only light in the world was in the ark itself. Just as the Torah details G-d's creation of animals, so too does the narrative detail Noach's taking the animals out of the ark. It is almost as if the world started all over again. Not coincidentally, after going forth from the ark G-d tells Noach that he should procreate, control the earth and be on a special diet. (Genesis 9:1-3) Blessings of procreation, control and diet were also given to Adam. (Genesis 1:28-29)

Yet, there is one significant difference between the creation story of Adam and of Noach. In the beginning G-d creates alone. When Noach leaves the ark to start beginning the world again, Noach participates in creation by immediately planting a vineyard.

The creation with Noach as a partner may be almost a repairing of the first version, where G-d alone created. Being given something and taking part in its creation are two different things. Once involved, one feels a sense of responsibility. For this reason Noach stands a greater chance of succeeding than Adam. And while soon after Noach the earth suffers in the dramatic incident of the Tower of Babel, still the earth is not destroyed as it was in the deluge. Progress had been made and still more progress would be made once Abraham and Sarah come on the scene.

One may claim that Noach failed in his task of creation, for the only mention of Noach after the flood is his becoming drunk. But it is not so simple. After devastation it is not easy to begin again. In that sense, I would claim that Noach clearly succeeded. His creation was a resounding success even while it was done with complex feelings and emotions.

We similarly must understand the strength and commitment of those who went on after the Shoah to recreate as well. After witnessing destruction with their very eyes, so many assumed responsibility and rebuilt their lives in Israel and throughout the world. That is the type of creation that is truly everlasting. © 2010 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.

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood... (66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones." (57: 15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nospecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who

explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftarah, "And it will be that from month to month... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings... May you establish a new altar in Zion... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

#### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## **Parsha Insights**

**T**his week we read the parsha of Noach. "Noach was a righteous man... And the world was in a (spiritually) destroyed state... And Hashem said to Noach: 'The (time for the) end of mankind has come before me. Make an ark, three hundred cubits long... three stories high... I will bring a flood onto the land that will destroy all flesh... You, your sons, your wife and their wives will enter the ark along with (a minimum of) two from each species... [6:9-19]"

Rashi [6:14] points out that Hashem had all of the options to choose from when He decided to destroy the world and save Noah. Why then did Hashem choose a flood and an ark which necessitated this arduous construction project? He explains that Hashem wanted that generation to see Noah spending 120 years building this ark. They would thus realize that Hashem was planning to destroy the world and would have the chance to repent.

"And Noah did all that Elokim had commanded him. [6:22]" Rashi: This is (referring to) the building of the ark.

The very next passuk has Hashem once again speaking to Noah and commanding him to enter the ark. A split-second pause in our reading but actually a 120-year interval. Amazing. The Torah doesn't record any further communication between those two points. Hashem spoke to him, told him to build the ark and then spoke again 120 years later to tell him it's time to enter!

The long, cold winter follows the warmth of inspiration and focus that was felt during the holidays. Decisions were reached, commitments were made but it's hard to take it through the long run. Things that we decided should become history seem to resurface as current events. Those are the thoughts that were racing through my mind when I was struck by Noah's perseverance throughout not the twenty days that have passed since Yom Kippur but 120-years! What can we do to try to lock in our commitments and ideals?

The Prophets [Shmuel I 17-25] tell a fascinating story. Shaul HaMelech {King Saul} had promised the hand of his daughter in marriage to whoever would defeat Galyas {Goliath} in battle. When Dovid {David} killed Galyas, Shaul, after much delaying, gave his daughter Michal to Dovid as a wife. However, Shaul's jealousy eventually led to many attempts on Dovid's life.

In one instance, Shaul had his men surround their house. Michal tipped off Dovid and helped him escape out the window. She then set up a dummy in bed and told her father's messengers that Dovid was too ill to come out, thus affording him the necessary time to escape.

Ultimately, Shaul erroneously claimed that Dovid's marriage to Michal had been invalid and gave Michal away as a wife to Palti ben Layish.

Shlomo HaMelech {King Solomon} taught in Mishlei: "Sheker ha'chein {Charm is false} v'hevel ha'yofee {and beauty is vain}, ishah yir'as Hashem hee tis'hallal {a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised}. [Proverbs 31:29]"

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 20A] reveals a deeper level upon which this passuk {verse} can be understood. "Charm is false" refers to Yosef and his withstanding the seduction of Potiphar's wife; "and beauty is vain" refers to Boaz and his not having relations with Ruth; "a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised" refers to Palti ben Layish.

Palti was faced with a seemingly impossible test. He and a beautiful, married woman were living in the same house. This wasn't a one-time urge that he would have to overcome but a test that would last for many years.

How did he do it? How did he overcome this gargantuan test and thus surpass even Yosef and Boaz in greatness?

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 19B] teaches that he plunged a sword (into the bed) between himself and Michal and said: Whoever deals with 'that matter' (meaning relations) should be stabbed by this sword.

What did this sword accomplish? Couldn't it simply be removed at a later point?

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l explains that Palti knew that the strong conviction he now felt would get dulled with time. He therefore turned that feeling into an action that would remain, giving himself a permanent, tangible manifestation of the powerful feelings of conviction he was then experiencing.

Palti's actions teach that decisions and convictions don't go the distance. A concrete act must be done in order to 'lock-in' those feelings. To keep the warmth of the holidays throughout these long winter months. © 2002 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**P**arshat Noach has G-d proclaiming Noah 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 Noah?

In "Darash Moshe", Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that if you're an individual, working on yourself and no one else, your goal should be to be perfect in 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 insight allegations and accusations. For this reason, many people would rather stay away from communal affairs, and lead a quiet life. However, G-d directly told Noah and us that although Noah could have kept to himself and become perfect, He prefers 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 "perfect" Jews! © 2001 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.