

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

For each of us there are milestones on our spiritual journey that change the direction of our life and set us on a new path. For me one such moment came when I was a rabbinical student at Jews' College and thus had the privilege of studying with one of the great rabbinic scholars of our time, Rabbi Dr Nachum Rabinovitch.

He was, and is, a giant: one the most profound Maimonidean scholars of the modern age, equally at home with virtually every secular discipline as with the entire rabbinic literature, and one of the boldest and most independent of poskim, as his several published volumes of Responsa show. He also showed what it was to have spiritual and intellectual courage, and that in our time has proved, sadly, all too rare.

The occasion was not special. He was merely giving us one of his regular divrei Torah. The week was parshat Noach. But the Midrash he quoted to us was extraordinary. In fact it is quite hard to find. It appears in the book known as Buber's Tanhuma, published in 1885 by Martin Buber's grandfather Shlomo from ancient manuscripts. It is a very early text – some say as early as the fifth century – and it has some overlap with an ancient Midrash of which we no longer have the full text, known as Midrash Yelamdenu.

The text is in two parts, and it is a commentary on G-d's words to Noah: "Then G-d said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark'" (Gen. 8:16). On this the Midrash says: "Noah said to himself, Since I only entered the ark with permission (from G-d), shall I leave without permission? The Holy One blessed be He said, to him: Are you looking for permission? In that case I give you permission, as it says, 'Then G-d said to Noah, Come out of the ark.'"

The Midrash then adds: "Said Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, If I had been there I would have smashed down [the doors of] the ark and taken myself out of it."¹

The moral Rabbi Rabinovitch drew – indeed the only one possible – was that when it comes to

¹ The Midrash seems to be based on the fact that this is the first verse in the Torah where the verb d-b-r (to speak) is used. The root a-m-r (to say) has a similar meaning but there is a slight difference between them. D-b-r usually implies speaking harshly, judgmentally. See also Ibn Ezra ad loc, who senses from the text that Noah was reluctant to leave the ark.

rebuilding a shattered world, you do not wait for permission. G-d gives us permission. He expects us to go on ahead.

This was, of course, part of an ancient tradition, mentioned by Rashi in his commentary (to Gen. 6:9), and central to the sages' understanding of why G-d began the Jewish people not with Noah but with Abraham. Noah, says the Torah, "walked with G-d" (6:9). But G-d said to Abraham, "Walk on ahead of Me ..." (Gen. 17:1). So the point was not new, but the drama and power of the Midrash were stunning.

Suddenly I understood that this is a significant part of what faith is in Judaism: to have the courage to pioneer, to do something new, to take the road less travelled, to venture out into the unknown. That is what Abraham and Sarah had done when they left their land, their home and their father's house. It is what the Israelites did in the days of Moses when they journeyed forth into the wilderness, guided only by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

Faith is precisely the courage to take a risk, knowing that "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4). It took faith to challenge the religions of the ancient world, especially when they were embodied in the greatest empires of their time. It took faith to stay Jewish in the Hellenistic age, when Jews and Judaism must have seemed small and parochial when set against the cosmopolitan culture of ancient Greece and the Alexandrian empire.

It took the faith of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla to build, already in the first century, the world's first ever system of universal, compulsory education (Baba Batra 21a), and the faith of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to realise that Judaism could survive the loss of independence, land and Temple, on the basis of an academy of scholars and a culture of scholarship.

In the modern age, even though many of Jewry's most distinguished minds either lost or abandoned their faith, nonetheless that ancient reflex survived. How else are we to understand the phenomenon that a tiny minority in Europe and the United States was able to produce so many shapers of the modern mind, each of them a pioneer in his or her own way: Einstein in physics, Durkheim in sociology, Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Mahler and Schoenberg in music, and a whole string of innovative economists from David Ricardo (the law of comparative advantage)

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to John von Neumann (Game Theory) to Milton Friedman (monetary theory), to Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (behavioural economics).

They dominated the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, from Freud and his circle to Viktor Frankl (Logotherapy), Aaron T. Beck (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and Martin Seligman (Positive Psychology). The pioneers of Hollywood and film were almost all Jewish. Even in popular music the achievement is stunning, from Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, masters of the American musical, to Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, the two supreme poets of popular music in the twentieth century.

In many cases – such is the fate of innovators – the people concerned had to face a barrage of criticism, disdain, opposition or disregard. You have to be prepared to be lonely, at best misunderstood, at worst vilified and defamed. As Einstein said, “If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare me a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German, and Germany will declare that I am a Jew.” To be a pioneer – as Jews know from our history - you have to be prepared to spend a long time in the wilderness.

That was the faith of the early Zionists. They knew early on, some from the 1860s, others after the pogroms of the 1880s, Herzl after the Dreyfus trial, that European Enlightenment and Emancipation had failed, that despite its immense scientific and political achievements, mainland Europe still had no place for the Jew. Some Zionists were religious, others were secular, but most importantly they all knew what the Midrash Tanhuma made so clear: when it comes to rebuilding a shattered world or a broken dream, you don't wait for permission from Heaven. Heaven is telling you to go ahead.

That is not *carte blanche* to do whatever we like. Not all innovation is constructive. Some can be very destructive indeed. But this principle of “Walk on ahead”, the idea that the Creator wants us, His greatest creation, to be creative, is what makes Judaism unique in the high value it places on the human person and the human condition.

Faith is the courage to take a risk for the sake

of G-d or the Jewish people; to begin a journey to a distant destination knowing that there will be hazards along the way, but knowing also that G-d is with us, giving us strength if we align our will with His. Faith is not certainty, but the courage to live with uncertainty.
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Noah, the man of the earth, drank of the wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside." (Gen. 9:20-22) The name Canaan appears for the first time in this story of the degradation of Noah.

Canaan was not one of his sons, but his grandson, a son of Ham. The truth is that mentioning Canaan here seems totally out of place and superfluous. Noah becomes drunk, perhaps only because he does not realize the evil potential of the fruit of the vine. His son Ham does nothing to hide his father's shame; much the opposite, he serves as talebearer, reporting his father's nakedness to his brothers outside. Shem and Japheth cover their father without looking at him in order to protect their father's honor. Ham is the villain; Shem and Japheth are the heroes. Why mention Canaan? Even more to the point, Canaan is a super-charged name; after all, the Land of Canaan is the Land of Israel, which will ultimately be taken over by Abraham and his progeny, descendants of Shem. There must be a special significance to the mention of Canaan precisely at this biblical juncture, just before the text records the descendants of Noah and the nations they generate.

The majority of traditional commentators explain the inclusion of Canaan by suggesting that Canaan castrated his grandfather. Apparently there was an oral tradition that reported this action. This was what Ham really saw and reported to his brothers - the ultimate degradation.

In order to further understand the biblical text and its significance today, we must take a look at the next time the Land of Canaan appears in the Bible, right at the end of our Torah portion: "And Terah took his son Abram, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, wife of Abram his son, and they departed with them from Ur Kasdim to set out for the Land of Canaan; they arrived at Haran and settled there" (Gen. 11:31).

It is curious that the text tells us Abram's father meant to go to the Land of Canaan but never really arrived; he only reached Haran, where, for whatever reason, he chose or was forced (perhaps by illness or old age, or the lack of means to complete the journey) to remain. Only two verses later, and as the opening of the next Torah portion, G-d appears to Abram without any prior buildup, commanding him to "go away from

your land, your relatives and your father's house [in Haran] to the land that I will show you [the Land of Canaan]" (Gen. 12:1). The commentators, as well as the Midrash, are hard pressed to discover why G-d is now electing Abram, and why Abram is so willing to obey the divine command.

Maimonides suggests, on the basis of the Midrash, that the renamed Abraham had actually discovered G-d by means of his own rational gifts of analysis and had begun his quest to discover the Ruler of the Universe at the tender age of three. He even cites the famous Midrash that Abraham's father, Terah, was an idol maker, thereby positioning Abraham as an iconoclast.

Abraham is the first purely self-motivated seeker of the Divine history (Mishne Torah, Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 1).

But I would argue that the simple reading of the text leads to a very different conclusion. Terah apparently wanted very much to bring his family to Canaan. Indeed, our Torah reading will soon record how, when Abraham successfully conquers the four terrorist kings of the region, Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of G-d the Most High, brings him bread and wine and blesses G-d for having delivered Abraham's enemies into his hand (Gen. 14:18-20). Abraham even gives Melchizedek tithes—a gift that one usually would give to the priests of the Holy Temple. And Salem is the ancient name for Jeru-Salem, which means City of Peace.

The Ramban therefore suggests (in his commentary ad loc.) that in the Land of Canaan, of which Salem is the capital, there was a tradition harking all the way back to Adam of ethical monotheism, of a G-d of the universe Who would ultimately destroy terrorists and reward righteous lovers of peace. Perhaps Terah, having heard of the ethical monotheism being taught in Canaan, wanted his children to be brought up in that environment. From this perspective, Abraham is not a rebel, but a continuator of his father's geographical and spiritual journey. That is why G-d is pretty certain that Abraham will accept the divine command; as the son of Terah, he has been primed to do so. Hence we may posit that in its mention of Canaan at this point, the Bible is setting the stage for an Abrahamic takeover of the Land of Canaan, soon to become the Land of Abraham-Israel.

Canaan is pictured as a special location, with specific ethical requirements. Only those who truly aspire to ethical monotheism will be worthy of making Canaan (Israel) their eternal homeland. Canaan, the grandson of Noah, forfeited his right because, instead of following in his grandfather's paths of righteousness and wholeheartedness, he chose to destroy his grandfather's ability to pass these values on to succeeding generations. Abraham, unlike Noah, succeeded in parenting a grandson—Jacob-Israel—

dedicated to righteousness and justice.

And herein may well be a warning: The descendants of Abraham will be privileged to live in Israel only for as long as they subscribe to such an ethical lifestyle.

And even if B'nei Yisrael eventually return to the land and are worthy of living in it, their return will always be dependent on the ethical quality of the daily lives they lead. As Rashi warns us in his opening of the Book of Genesis, "the entire world belongs to the Holy One, Blessed be He; He created it, and He will give it to whoever is righteous in His eyes" (Rashi on Gen. 1:1)
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The events described in this week's parsha only serve to confirm the diagnosis of human behavior already recorded for us in last week's parsha — that the nature of human beings, if left alone, will invariably turn to evil behavior. Not only that but the recounting of the behavior of the family of Noach, even after experiencing the flood and the destruction of much of humankind, instructs us as to how difficult it is to really change human nature.

The long history of the Jewish people particularly, and of civilization generally, indicates clearly that miracles, disasters, proven failures and generational events have little effect on individual or even communal human behavior. Since everyone believes that he or she is the exception to human mortality and to the effects of one's own behavior and actions, it is very difficult to convince one's own self that changes in lifestyle and attitudes are necessary.

The evil nature within us is the part of our persona and mental makeup that is most resistant to allowing lessons of life to be learned and effective change to be generated. Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant stated that "the loudest noise made in the physical world is that of the breaking of a habit." Most evil that is perpetrated in this world is simply a product of habitually bad behavior.

I think that habit alone is sufficient to help us understand how the world could believe in paganism for millennia on end, no matter what the consequences and results of such a pernicious belief were. Even the great flood would not prevent most of the descendants of Noach from sinking back into the quagmire of paganism. It was not so much a matter of belief as it was a matter of habit.

From this introduction to the nature of humanity, as related in the first two portions of the Torah, the rest of the Torah becomes more understandable and we gain greater perspective into it. The main purpose of the Torah, in its simplest and most sublime sense, is to break us of our bad habits, ultimately to replace them with better ways of doing and

behaving.

That is why the commandments of the Torah are so insistently repetitive in our daily lives because only by repetition is habitual behavior established. All athletes are aware that only by constant and daily training will their muscular and physical abilities become enhanced and of second nature. It is this regimen of training that allows for excellence in competition. Leaving one's spiritual side to apathy and inaction will automatically guarantee that the habits of evil behavior will dominate.

Thus, most of the Torah is simply counter intuitive. It speaks against the perpetuation of bad habits and demands of us the necessary changes in outlook and behavior that will make us better people. Naturally, the definition of good and evil is based upon G-d's judgment. But over the many millennia of human existence that definition of good and evil has stayed the test of time and remains the fulcrum of civilization. The righteousness of Noach lay with his ability to change for the better and rise above his society. That challenge remains for all of us as well. ©2015 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And G-d said to Noach, 'the end of all flesh has come before Me, for the land has become full of thievery because of them' (B'reishis 6:13).

What is being added by the word "because of them"?

Rashi's commentary on this verse has led to much discussion, mostly because of two issues. For one thing, Rashi first tells us it was the end of "all flesh" because wherever there is rampant adultery both good and bad people are killed, implying that the sin of promiscuity was the cause of the flood, then he tells us that their decree was "sealed" because of thievery, implying that this was the cause of the flood. The second issue discussed is why, with that generation having committed so many sins, it was specifically thievery that sealed the deal.

As far as the dual causes, most commentators resolve the issue by saying that it was only because of adultery that the initial decree included everyone (not just those guilty of that particular sin), whereas the decree to wipe everyone out wouldn't have been enacted yet if not for the thievery. [Having the initial decree include everyone is not necessary to address this issue, as the decree could have been made (regardless of who it would have been directed at) because of the adultery, but enacted sooner than it otherwise would have been because of the thievery. Nevertheless, the verse does say "the end of all flesh"

had arrived, and there is a tradition that wherever adultery is involved, all are impacted by the punishment. The very fact that Rashi quotes the Midrash (B'reishis Rabbah 26:5) which is explaining a different verse (6:2) for our verse (6:13) indicates that his point was to explain why it was "all flesh" and not just the sinners.] Which leads to the second issue of why thievery is considered so much worse than all the other sins they committed, to the extent that G-d didn't postpone the decree any longer.

Ramban says that theft is worse because we don't need G-d to command us not to steal to know that it's wrong. However, as Tzaidah La'derech points out, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a, Rashi's source; see also Vayikra Rabbah 33:3) says that it was the sin of thievery that sealed their fate despite their having committed every other sin too. "Every sin" would include other sins that we would have figured out on our own (e.g. murder), yet those sins didn't seal their fate.

L'vush is among those who say theft is worse because it causes its victims to cry out to G-d for help, and He won't postpone helping those who cry out to Him (as opposed to sinning only against G-d, such as worshiping idols, or sins like murder, where the victim can't cry out to Him, which He will tolerate for a while in order to give the sinner a chance to repent). However, as pointed out in Sefer Yosef Hallel, Yechezkel (22:3-13) lists the sins that were being committed then, and among those listed (22:7) is oppressing converts, orphans and widows (who also cry out to G-d), and yet the fate of that generation was only sealed because of their thievery (see Rashi and Radak on 22:13). Besides, G-d told Noach that the land was "full of thievery" before commanding him to build an ark, and the ark took 120 years to build (see Rashi on 6:14); obviously He didn't answer their cries (from thievery) immediately (see B'er Ba'sadeh).

M'lo Ha'omer suggests a cute answer, based on the well-known Midrash (Tosefta Nega'im 6:6, Vayikra Rabbah 17:4, Tanchuma Tazriya 10/14 & Metzora 4/12, Midrash HaGadol Vayikra 14:32; see also Rambam's Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as 16:10) that when a person sins, G-d first punishes his possessions, hoping he will repent, before punishing the sinner directly (on his body). Since thievery was so rampant, it wasn't really their possessions (but what had been stolen from others), so G-d had to punish them directly. This, he says, is what is meant by the decree being sealed because of the thievery, as it prevented the punishment from being inflicted first on their possessions. However, this suggestion is quite problematic. First of all, even if all of their possessions were stolen (and therefore not really theirs), or if it would have been problematic if the possessions they really owned were affected while those they stole were left alone, there are plenty of ways G-d could have

punished them directly (pain, suffering, disease, et al) without killing them. Secondly, this wouldn't impact *when* the decree was sealed, only *what* the decree was (on their possessions or on their bodies). Third, the point of the Talmudic statement is that the sin of stealing is worse than other sins, as evidenced by the fact that it was only because of this sin that their fate was sealed; if the decree was only sealed because of thievery for practical reasons (because punishing them via their possessions wasn't an option), how it impacted the decree has little bearing on how severe the actual sin is.

Gur Aryeh suggests two answers (and dismisses a third), with the first being similar to the answer given by B'er Yitzhok and Malbim (and the answer that resonates most with me); when thievery is rampant, society cannot function, as no one can trust anyone for anything. Therefore, the world had to be destroyed in order to start from scratch. Similarly, Tzaidah La'derech characterizes this state of society as one that has none of the three "pillars" necessary for the world to survive (laws, truth and peace, see Avos 1:18), so it could no longer be sustained.

Another issue discussed by the commentators is why/how "good people" could be killed along with those who were steeped in promiscuity. One of the more common answers given (see Gur Aryeh) is that once the "destroyer" is let loose, it does not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked. (Although this concept itself needs an explanation, suffice it to say, for now, that the "righteous" who are impacted were not worthy of divine protection, so if within danger's path suffer the same consequences.) However, the wording here is "those who are good and those who are bad," not "the righteous and the wicked," indicating that something else is at work here. L'vush suggests that none are really innocent; rather, some have sinned so often that they must be punished, while others committed the same sin, just not as often, and wouldn't have been punished yet, but are punished now too. Here too, referring to them as "good" doesn't seem appropriate either, as they also sinned. Others (e.g. Bartenura) suggest that "the good ones" refers to children, who are not old enough to have sinned, but calling them "good" wouldn't be precise since sinning wasn't an option for them. [The same is true of Nachalas Yaakov's suggestion that "good" refers to those animals who did not crossbreed.] I will therefore suggest a different approach to explain how the "good ones" could be punished with the "bad ones," one that puts a slightly different perspective on the decree being sealed specifically because of the thievery.

As previously mentioned, when the Midrash (B'reishis Rabbah 26:5) says that rampant adultery causes both good and bad people to be killed, it is explaining the consequences of the very first mention of promiscuity (6:2), not the state of things closer to the

time of the flood. The actual wording is "wherever you find promiscuity (or adultery), *androlmosia* (likely a Greek or Latin word) enters the world, which kills the good and the bad." Although the "standard" way of defining "androlmosia" is "plague" since plagues have the same effect, there was no literal plague here (by the flood). The term seems to be borrowed precisely because it has the same effect, but the bottom line is that it refers to the eventual outcome being severe, not the mechanism through which it occurs. As a matter of fact, Rabbi Chaim Paltiel translates "androlmosia" as "an evil spirit," meaning that rampant promiscuity impacts society in a way that eventually even those who were not sinning will be adversely affected as well. [It may refer to the "stink" that emitted from Roman vomitoria.] Despite the fact that some did not sin initially, and were, at the time, "good," moral depravity (on a societal level) eventually impacts everyone, which will lead to even those who had been "good" to also sin.

Rashi first tells us that the "end of all flesh" became inevitable because of the moral depravity, then adds that when its impact had caused rampant thievery, the decree was sealed. Even those who had not engaged in adultery were guilty of stealing (see Rebbe Yaakov ben Shabsi, a Tosafist referred as "Chizkuni," even though the name "Chizkuni" usually refers to Rabbi Chizkiyah ben R' Manoach), as a result of the moral depravity brought about by the adultery (of others). And when the thievery became so widespread that society could no longer be sustained, G-d told Noah that He was going to bring a flood to wipe them out and start again.

The verse now reads quite nicely: "The end of all flesh," both those who brought about the moral depravity and those who were eventually impacted by it, "has come before Me, for the land has become full of thievery," and the world cannot survive under such conditions. How did the world get to such a state? "Because of them," i.e. because of those who were promiscuous and created an atmosphere of moral depravity. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

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. ©2015 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 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", Rav 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 (consider reading Guard Your Tongue, learning an Aliya a day, outreach, supporting underprivileged and/or abused women and children, etc.) 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. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

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"Noach was a righteous man (tzadik), he was perfect (tamim) in his generations" (Breishit 6:9). Noach's deeds are described here as "righteous", while his "ways", referring to his character, as the Ibn Ezra explains, "tamim b'libo", are described as "perfect" (Avodah Zara, 6a).

The Meshech Chochma explains that Noach lived in two generations, one before the flood and one after the flood. Before the flood Noach was righteous since he did not steal like all the others (Rashi 6:11 and Avodah Zara ibid.), and did not engage in sexual immorality like all flesh (6:11, Rashi). After the flood, everyone refrained from sexual immorality (see Rashi 9:19) and theft, so Noach was not a unique tzadik in that generation.

Tamim means one who is humble and of low spirit ("sh'fal ruach", Rashi Avodah Zara ibid.). Before the flood, when everyone ridiculed Noach, his humility was insignificant. After the flood, when he alone survived, Hashem spoke to him and saved him, and he fed the entire world (see Rashi 7:23), Noach still did not become haughty and then his humility was significant. Noach was therefore called a tzadik in the generation before the flood, since his righteous deeds were unique and noteworthy, while after the flood he was called tamim, since his ways, i.e. his humility despite his historic accomplishments, were unique and noteworthy. Moreover, his humility stood in stark contrast to the dor haflaga whose haughtiness led them to attempt to wage war with Hashem (Rashi 11:1, Rav Y.

Cooperman footnote 12 to Meshech Chochma).

"Vayisha'er ach Noach -- only Noach survived" (7:23). Rashi interprets "ach" to indicate a minimization, specifically it minimizes Noach's health because he was injured by the animals he fed. An alternative explanation minimizes Noach himself, i.e. he remained "only Noach", the same humble person, despite his unique accomplishments.

Hashem recalled Noach with words of salvation and mercy ("b'dvar yeshua v'rachamim" -- Musaf Rosh Hashana, Zichronos). The same phrase is found in the tefillah of "Ya'ale v'yavo": "b'dvar yeshua v'rachamim...v'racheim aleinu v'hoshi'einu -- in the matter of salvation and mercy, have mercy on us and save us." Noach, in his humility, did not ask to be saved by his merits, but pleaded for salvation based on mercy. We, too, beseech Hashem for salvation based on mercy, not on our merits, in Ya'ale v'yavo (R.Y.D. Schlesinger).

Living in our generation presents a dual challenge. Sexual immorality is approaching pre-flood proportions. Promiscuity is the norm on university campuses, and tens of millions of Americans pursue adultery on the internet, as was recently discovered. Too many otherwise Orthodox Jews engage in these behaviors as well. And even worse, they do so openly and expect, and even receive, honor in their communities and shuls.

Similar openness and official acceptance is granted to homosexual behavior as well. Noachides did not write marriage contracts for two males (Chulin 92b). Even though they had male partners, they did not treat the prohibition so lightly as to write marriage contracts (Rashi ibid). Today, gay marriage, which was unthinkable in both antiquity and the recent past, is the law of the land in America. Here, too, otherwise Orthodox Jews engage in these behaviors openly, and expect, and even receive, honor in their communities and shuls.

We must try to be like Noach the tzadik and abstain from all types of sexual immorality. We must not honor those who practice such behaviors openly. As Orthodox Jews, we are required to avoid activities which can lead to immorality, i.e. abizrayhu d'gilui arayos. We therefore must be modest in dress and demeanor, and watch what we say and what we see (Shabbos 33a, Brachos 12b).

Our generation has achieved great technological accomplishments and financial successes. The generation of the flood became haughty because of the bounty that Hashem gave them (Sanhedrin 108a). We dare not repeat their mistake. Rather, we must try to be like Noach the tamim, maintaining humility and a lowly spirit despite our accomplishments and successes.

The generation of the flood was destroyed because of immorality and haughtiness. Our generation

faces similar challenges. In the merit of our resisting sinful behavior, rejecting its acceptability, and maintaining humility in the spirit of Noach, may our tefilos, like his, be answered with salvation and mercy.

Postscript

"One who separates himself from the community...and does not personalize their troubles...has no share in the Word to Come." -- Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 3:11

Unrelated to the discussion of sexual immorality above, the suffering experienced recently in Israel must be close to all of our hearts and demands that each of us engage in unrelenting introspection and teshuva.

One month ago, on Rosh Hashana, in the Zichronos section of Musaf, we declared: "Regarding states it is declared; which to the sword and which to peace." Unfortunately the state and people of Israel have experienced a month of murders by cruel enemies. Any hubris of a perfect self-defense has been shattered. "If Hashem will not guard the city, the watchman guards in vain" (Tehillim 127:1).

Of course all appropriate security measured must be taken. But we must also, like Noach, cry to Hashem to save us with mercy, on Rosh Hashana, in Ya'ale v'yavo on holidays and Rosh Chodesh, and every day. The heartfelt Tehillim recited worldwide on behalf of our beleaguered brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael reflects our utter dependence on Hashem's mercy and reinforces the humility that characterized Noach. ©2015 Rabbi M. Willig & TorahWeb.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This 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 Noach. 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 Noach 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 Noach 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 Noach 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 Noach'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. ©2015 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI E. SCHELLER

Everyone's Doing It

"Noach opened the window of the ark which he made, and he sent out the raven... (8:6,7)

Noach was unsure if the climate was suitable for man and beast, and so he sent the raven to find out. The raven objected to being sent, saying to Noach, "I know the reason why you are sending me away! You are interested in my mate!"

What was the rationale behind the raven's objection? Did he really think that Noach was interested in his mate?!

The way you are is the way you think everyone else is. Righteous people generally think that everyone is good. Likewise, a person who acts immorally assumes that everyone else acts similarly. A thief thinks everyone steals, an alcoholic thinks everyone drinks. The raven was one of the three who disobeyed G-d's command to separate from their mate while in the ark as the world was being destroyed. He therefore suspected Noach, because he himself was guilty of illicit activity.

There is a tendency to try to validate one's sins by saying, "Everyone does it." Of course, that is not necessarily true. It is possible that you think everyone does it simply because you do it! Indeed, the Talmud states that one who invalidates others is himself invalidated, and usually it is with his own blemishes that he brands others as invalid. For example, if one calls another a slave, it is a sign that he himself is most probably a slave. If you find yourself constantly berating others, it is a sign that you need to do some self-introspection to see where it is coming from. On the other hand, if a person is constantly praising others it is a sign that he himself is worthy of praise.

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