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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I once had the opportunity to ask the Catholic writer Paul Johnson what had struck him most about Judaism during the long period he spent researching it for his masterly A History of the Jews? He replied in roughly these words: "There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasised the individual -- like the secular West today. And there have been others that placed weight on the collective -- communist Russia or China, for example."

Judaism, he continued, was the most successful example he knew of that managed the delicate balance between both -- giving equal weight to individual and collective responsibility. Judaism was a religion of strong individuals and strong communities. This, he said, was very rare and difficult, and constituted one of our greatest achievements.

It was a wise and subtle observation. Without knowing it, he had in effect paraphrased Hillel's aphorism: "If I am not for myself, who will be (individual responsibility)? But if I am only for myself, what am I (collective responsibility)?" This insight allows us to see the argument of Parshat Noach in a way that might not have been obvious otherwise.

The parsha begins and ends with two great events, the Flood on the one hand, Babel and its tower on the other. On the face of it they have nothing in common. The failings of the generation of the Flood are explicit. "The world was corrupt before G-d, and the land was filled with violence. G-d saw the world, and it was corrupted. All flesh had perverted its way on the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12). Wickedness, violence, corruption, perversion: this is the language of systemic moral failure.

Babel by contrast seems almost idyllic. "The entire earth had one language and a common speech" (11:1). The builders are bent on construction, not destruction. It is far from clear what their sin was. Yet from the Torah's point of view Babel represents another serious wrong turn, because immediately thereafter G-d summons Abraham to begin an entirely new chapter in the religious story of humankind. There is no Flood -- G-d had, in any case, sworn that He would never again punish humanity in such a way ("Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have just done", 8:21). But it is clear that after Babel, G-d comes to the conclusion that there must be another and different way for humans to live.

Both the Flood and the Tower of Babel are rooted in actual historical events, even if the narrative is not couched in the language of descriptive history. Mesopotamia had many flood myths, all of which testify to the memory of disastrous inundations, especially on the flat lands of the Tigris-Euphrates valley (See Commentary of R. David Zvi Hoffman to Genesis 6 [Hebrew, 140] who suggests that the Flood may have been limited to centres of human habitation, rather than covering the whole earth). Excavations at Shurrupak, Kish, Uruk and Ur -- Abraham's birthplace -- reveal evidence of clay flood deposits. Likewise the Tower of Babel was a historical reality. Herodotus tells of the sacred enclosure of Babylon, at the centre of which was a ziqqurat or tower of seven stories, 300 feet high. The remains of more than thirty such towers have been discovered, mainly in lower Mesopotamia, and many references have been found in the literature of the time that speak of such towers "reaching heaven".

However, the stories of the Flood and Babel are not merely historical, because the Torah is not history but "teaching, instruction." They are there because they represent a profound moral-social-political-spiritual truth about the human situation as the Torah sees it. They represent, respectively, precisely the failures intimated by Paul Johnson. The Flood tells us what happens to civilisation when individuals rule and there is no collective. Babel tells us what happens when the collective rules and individuals are sacrificed to it.

It was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), the thinker who laid the foundations of modern politics in his classic Leviathan (1651), who -- without referring to the Flood -- gave it its best interpretation. Before there were political institutions, said Hobbes, human beings were in a "state of nature". They were individuals, packs, bands. Lacking a stable ruler, an effective government and enforceable laws, people would be in

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a state of permanent and violent chaos -- "a war of every man against every man" -- as they competed for scarce resources. There would be "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Such situations exist today in a whole series of failed or failing states. That is precisely the Torah's description of life before the Flood. When there is no rule of law to constrain individuals, the world is filled with violence.

Babel is the opposite, and we now have important historical evidence as to exactly what was meant by the sentence, "The entire land had one language and a common speech." This may not refer to primal humanity before the division of languages. In fact in the previous chapter the Torah has already stated, "From these the maritime peoples spread out into their lands in their clans within their nations, each with its own language" (Gen. 10:5. The Talmud Yerushalmi, Megillah 1:11, 71b, records a dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Johanan, one of whom holds that the division of humanity into seventy languages occurred before the Flood).

The reference seems to be to the imperial practice of the neo-Assyrians, of imposing their own language on the peoples they conquered. One inscription of the time records that Ashurbanipal II "made the totality of all peoples speak one speech." A cylinder inscription of Sargon II says, "Populations of the four quarters of the world with strange tongues and incompatible speech... whom I had taken as booty at the command of Ashur my lord by the might of my sceptre, I caused to accept a single voice." The neo-Assyrians asserted their supremacy by insisting that their language was the only one to be used by the nations and populations they had defeated. On this reading, Babel is a critique of imperialism.

There is even a hint of this in the parallelism of language between the builders of Babel and the Egyptian Pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites. In Babel they said, "Come, [hava] let us build ourselves a city and a tower... lest [pen] we be scattered over the face of the earth" (Gen. 11:4). In Egypt Pharaoh said, "Come, [hava] let us deal wisely with them, lest [pen] they increase so much..." (Ex. 1:10). The repeated "Come, let us... lest" is too pronounced to be accidental. Babel, like Egypt, represents an empire that subjugates entire populations, riding roughshod over their identities and freedoms.

If this is so, we will have to re-read the entire Babel story in a way that makes it much more convincing. The sequence is this: Genesis 10 describes the division of humanity into seventy nations and seventy languages. Genesis 11 tells of how one imperial power conquered smaller nations and imposed its language and culture on them, thus directly contravening G-d's wish that humans should respect the integrity of each nation and each individual. When at the end of the Babel story G-d "confuses the language" of the builders, He is not creating a new state of affairs but restoring the old.

Interpreted thus, the story of Babel is a critique of the power of the collective when it crushes individuality -- the individuality of the seventy cultures described in Genesis 10. (A personal note: I had the privilege of addressing 2,000 leaders from all the world's faiths at the Millennium Peace Summit in the United Nations in August 2000. It turned out that there were exactly 70 traditions -- each with their subdivisions and sects -- represented. So it seems there still are seventy basic cultures). When the rule of law is used to suppress individuals and their distinctive languages and traditions, this too is wrong. The miracle of monotheism is that Unity in Heaven creates diversity on earth, and G-d asks us (with obvious conditions) to respect that diversity.

So the Flood and the Tower of Babel, though polar opposites, are linked, and the entire parsha of Noach is a brilliant study in the human condition. There are individualistic cultures and there are collectivist ones, and both fail, the former because they lead to anarchy and violence, the latter because they lead to oppression and tyranny.

So Paul Johnson's insight turns out to be both deep and true. After the two great failures of the Flood and Babel, Abraham was called on to create a new form of social order that would give equal honour to the individual and the collective, personal responsibility and the common good. That remains the special gift of Jews and Judaism to the world.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And Haran died before his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim." (Gen. 11:28) When it comes to questions of belief, the agnostic is the loneliest of all. On one side of the fence stands the atheist, confident in his rejection of G-d and often dedicated to the debunking of religion, which he considers to be 'the opiate of the masses" (per Karl Marx). On the other side stands the believer, who glories in his faith that the universe is the handiwork of

G-d. The agnostic stands in the middle, not knowing (a-gnost) whether or not G-d exists, usually despairing of the possibility of acquiring certitude about anything transcending observable material phenomena.

Our Biblical portion makes reference to two very different agnostics, Haran and Noah. The contrast between them contains an important lesson for agnostics, believers and atheists, alike.

The Bible states that Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and sons' wives, went into the ark "because of the waters of the Flood" (Gen. 7:7). From this verse, Rashi derives that "Noah had little faith; he believed and he didn't believe that the Flood would arrive."

Noah didn't enter the ark until the water literally pushed him in. Rashi's phrase that "he believed and he didn't believe" is really another way of describing an agnostic who remains in the state of his uncertainty; he believes and doesn't believe. Noah is therefore described by Rashi as the first agnostic.

The second Biblical agnostic appears in the guise of Haran. "These are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (Gen. 11:27).

Why does the text specify "and Haran died before his father in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim" (Ibid. v. 28)? What is the significance of citing the exact place of Haran's death?

Rashi explains by citing a fascinating midrashic tradition, and at the same time extracts Haran from relative anonymity, setting him up as a counterfoil agnostic to Noah. This midrash details how Terah, the father of the clan and a famous idol manufacturer, brings charges in the court of King Nimrod against his own son. He accuses Abram of being an iconoclast who destroyed his father's idols while preaching heretical monotheism. As punishment, Abram is to be cast into the fiery furnace.

Haran is present at the trial and takes the position of having no position. He remains on the sidelines thinking that if Nimrod's furnace will prove hotter than Abram's flesh, he will side with the king; but if Abram survives the fire, then it would be clear that Abram's G-d is more powerful than Nimrod's gods, and he will throw in his lot with his brother.

Only after Abram emerges unscathed, is Haran ready to rally behind his brother. He confidently enters the fiery furnace (literally: Ur Kasdim), but no miracles await him. Haran burns to death.

Is it not strange that the fate of the two agnostics should be so di?erent? We read how Noah was a man of little faith, and yet not only does he survive the Flood, he turns into one of the central figures of human history. He is even termed "righteous" in the Bible.

In contrast, Haran, father of Lot, brother to Abraham, hovers on the edge of obscurity, and is even punished with death for his lack of faith. Why is Haran's agnosticism considered so much worse than Noah's?

Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z"l, explained that while Noah and Haran shared uncertainty about G-d, there was a vast di?erence between them. Noah, despite his doubts, nevertheless build the ark, pounding away for 120 years, even su?ering abuse from a world ridiculing his eccentric persistence. Noah may not have entered the ark until the rains began—but he did not wait for the Flood before obeying the divine command to build an ark!

Noah may think like an agnostic, but he acts like a believer. Haran, on the other hand, dies because he waits for someone else to test the fires. In refusing to act for G-d during Abram's trial, he acted against G-d. In e?ect, his indecision is very much a decision. He is an agnostic who acts like an atheist.

Indecision is also a decision. A person who is indecisive about protesting an evil action or a malicious statement is aiding and abetting that malevolence by his very indecisive silence. After all, our sages teach that "silence is akin to assent."

Noah reached his spiritual level because he acted, not so much out of faith, but despite his lack of it. Our Sages understood very well the di?culty of faith and the phenomenon of agnosticism. What they attempt to teach the agnostic is: If you are unsure, why do you act as if you are an atheist? Would it not be wiser to act as if you were a believer?

We learn from Noah's life and Haran's death that perfect faith is not necessary in order to conduct one's life. Belief is never as important as action. In the World to Come, there is room for all kinds of agnostics. It depends primarily on how they acted on earth.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is understandably easy to become disgusted with human beings, with society and with the behavior of individuals. Over the many millennia, from the days of Noach until today, human history is a litany of violence, war, massacres of innocents, corruption, false idols, bankrupt ideals and constant strife. Europe has not known a war-free time for many centuries.

The very agencies created by human efforts to right wrongs, adjudicate disputes and promote harmony among peoples have themselves proven to be as corrupt and biased as to have become practically irrelevant in the practical world where we all reside. Apparently such was the state of the world at the time of Noach as well. And then and there, somehow G-d despaired of the human race almost completely.

The Torah speaks to us in a metaphoric fashion of G-d's "regrets," so to speak, in having created humankind and investing it with free will, because of the evil it perpetrated. And yet, in the narrative regarding the covenant of the rainbow, G-d somehow "regrets" having destroyed the world and commits Himself, so to

speak, to never doing so again. The lesson here is that disgust and despair, no matter how seemingly justified, are not godly traits.

Giving in to the weaknesses of human nature that surround us and that we are constantly made aware of by the media and other story mongers, is a sign of human foolishness and not wisdom. King Solomon, in Kohelet which we have just recently heard read in our synagogues, points out all of the negativities of human life. He also is tempted to despair of human life. But at the last instant he catches himself and ends on a note of quiet faith.

Noach rebuilds the world after its destruction. The world is not rebuilt in a perfect fashion. Almost all of the evils of human society that existed before the great flood reappear once again in human society. But the Torah now concentrates its narrative on certain individuals who will influence all later human life for good and benefit.

Abraham could not apparently save or even influence Sodom but the story of humanity will now focus on the good people, even if they be few in number and apparently weak in power. This shift of emphasis in the biblical narrative is itself the key to understanding the message of Judaism and Jewish history throughout the ages. We should never despair because of the presence of so much negative evil in the world.

If the great and righteous Noach gave in to despair about the human condition, which is the source of all of the negative commentary about him that appears in rabbinic literature, we are not to emulate him in this regard. The world is rebuilt through goodness and beneficence not through carping and cynicism. In a dangerous world such as the one we live in, realism and practicality are essential for survival. However, despair and disappointment are not.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The picture of Noah's ark in children's books with a giraffe neck up, hanging out of the ark, speaks to a fundamental question. How did all the animals, birds and creeping things fit into the ark? (Genesis 6:19)

Ibn Ezra characteristically offers a literal observation. The cubit mentioned in the Torah with respect to building the ark, was of tremendous length--longer than what the Torah would later consider to be the length of a cubit. The ark, for Ibn Ezra, was massive. Hence, it could contain everything.

Ramban disagrees. For him, it was, in fact, miraculous that the ark was able to take in an unlimited number of species that existed. To paraphrase Ramban, a miracle was performed and the small space was able to contain everything.

It is here that Ramban asks—if, in fact, that were the case, why didn't G-d ask Noah to build the ark even smaller?

Here Ramban introduces a basic concept concerning miracles. Even when a miracle occurs, humankind must do its share. In the words of Ramban, "this is the way of all miracles in the Torah…..for humankind to do what it can and for the rest to be left in the hands of G-d."

Ramban's position on miracles becomes complete when taking into account his opinion that Avraham (Abraham), in next week's portion, sinned when he left the land of Israel without G-d's permission, because of the famine. Avraham had no right to leave the land without explicit permission from G-d. (Ramban, Genesis 12:10)

Yet, it could be argued that Avraham, by acting to improve his situation, did not sin. He did what he had to, and did not rely on miracles to save himself and his family.

Bearing in mind Ramban's passion for Zion as found in the Noah story, a possible solution to the Avraham inconsistency comes to mind. Ramban argues that the olive branch brought by the dove after the deluge, came from the land of Israel, which was not destroyed during the flood. (Ramban, Genesis 8:11) For Ramban, Israel is in a unique category. When it comes to the land of Israel, we can rely on miracles. Avraham should therefore not have left, he should have kept hope that G-d would intervene—as the land of Israel escaped the deluge so would it survive the famine.

When considering the courage of many Israelis living on the border, who, despite bombardments from the enemy over the years, held their ground and refused to budge, Ramban's comments come to mind. We're not to rely on miracles. But relative to the State of Israel, G-d watches even more closely.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Noah, man of the earth, profaned himself and planted a vineyard" (Genesis 9:20). Previously the Torah called Noah "a righteous man."

What happened?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz comments that by planting the vineyard first, Noah revealed his essence. He should have planted more essential produce first.

His choice of priorities lowered his previous spiritual level.

Whenever you have a number of things to choose from, note what you choose first. This is a powerful tool to gain greater self-awareness. Regardless of your present level, strive to build up such a love for doing good that it will be first on your list of things to do! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Chamei Teverya

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

"All the fountains of the deep opened". This marked the beginning of the flood, but at the conclusion of the flood the Torah states "And the fountains of the deep closed" to which our sages derive that not all the fountains of the deep were closed. Those which benefit human kind were left open, as the hot springs of Teverya (Rashi).

In Jewish law, when we refer to a source of heat we are referring to fire. Thus if we are discussing cooking on Shabbat, or the roasting of the Pascal lamb, or the prohibition of cooking milk and meat together, we refer to acts performed with fire or any derivative thereof. Hence, someone cooking with the hot springs of Teverya, would not be culpable.

Cooking on Shabbat refers to using fire and not the hot springs of Tverya or the sun. (Rashi Tractate Shabbat39). If we could harness the sun to cook on Shabbat, according to normative Halacha it might be permitted (Shmirat Shabbat K'hilchata chapter one note127)

Some say that when a Non-Jew cooks using the waters of "Chamei Teverya" the food does not become forbidden because of "Bishulei Akum" (food cooked by a Non-Jew, which is forbidden to partake thereof) since the heat is not of fire. However all would agree that should a person cook a non-kosher product in a pot, using as the heat source the "Chamei Teverya", that the utensil and the food would become forbidden. There is a concept in Jewish law of "K'bolo Kach Polto" (a utensil that absorbs by fire can only be rid of the prohibitive substance only when heated in the same way that it absorbed the original product). If we carry this further we might derive that if the pot absorbed the prohibitive food by fire, it can only rid itself of this prohibitive ingredient only by fire and not the "Chamei Teverya". Thus, the people of Teverya can save on electric in using the "Chamei Teverya" waters to kosher their utensils before Pesach.

Another interesting fact; women would be able to use the waters of "Chamei Teverya" for purification purposes, but the waters cannot be used for "Netilat Yadayim" (washing hands before a meal), for the law is that hot water could only be used for "Nitilat Yadaim , if it was once cold and then heated. However water which was always heated (as "Chamei Teverya") cannot be used for "Nitilat Yadayim". However some sages state that the reason the "Chamei Teverya" waters cannot be used for "Netailat Yadayim is because of the sulfur content which makes it unfit for eating.

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

In describing the flood, the Torah tells us, "And the rain was upon the earth for forty days and forty nights" (Bereishis 7:12). Rashi explains that the pasuk refers to the deluge as mere rain, because when the flood began, Hashem in his abundant kindness let the rain fall pleasantly. He was offering yet another opportunity for the wayward generation to mend their ways, and thereby cause the rain to continue as a sun shower instead of changing into a deadly torrential downpour.

Rav Wolbe comments that this idea is mentioned in the tefillah of U'Nisaneh Tokef recited on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. "Until the day he dies, You wait for him; if he repents you accept him immediately." In Hashem's eyes, late, is never too late. He warned the generation for a hundred and twenty years, and then added another seven days before initiating the flood. After all that, when the water had already started falling from the heavens, Hashem still waited; maybe, just maybe, they would repent and be spared from destruction.

Elul is over. The Yomim Noraim are behind us, and we have already passed Hoshana Rabba too. Very possibly, some look back and think, "We could have done more." Many will push off any thoughts of further repentance until next year. The Torah is informing us that it's never too late. Hashem is always waiting for us, not just during the High Holidays. As the saying goes, "Beat the Elul rush and do teshuva now."

After Noach left the teivah, he offered korbanos to Hashem: "And Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma and Hashem said in His heart I will not continue to curse the ground..." (ibid. 8:21). The Ramban writes that when Hashem instructed Noach to gather into the teivah seven from each of the kosher animals, He told him that it was for the purpose of offering korbanos after he leaves the teivah. The sacrifices would be the necessary merit and an impetus for Hashem to make a covenant not to bring another flood upon the world.

Rav Wolbe comments that we can deduce from here the power of man's actions. Hashem instructs us, and then waits for us to follow His instructions. When His commandment is fulfilled He accepts it as a pleasant aroma, and creates a covenant for our benefit!

This idea holds true not just with regard to korbanos, but also for all mitzvos. Hashem longs to

bestow infinite bounty upon us. He commands us, and then waits for us to fulfill His commandments -- so that He can reward us! The mitzvah is the trigger which sets Hashem's abundant kindness into motion. It's not enough to be a Jew in one's heart. The mitzvos are imperative, and the bounty is generated in proportion to the purity and perfection in the way they are performed. Does an added dose of meticulousness in the performance of a mitzvah really matter? Yes it does; and it is you, due to the tremendous kindness of Hashem, who stands to gain from such an investment!

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Dvar from Rabbi Zweig

In Parshat Noach, the Torah introduces the episode of the building of the Tower of Bavel with a description of the building materials which were used. Rashi comments that since Bavel was a plain, having no mountains and rocks, the inhabitants of the area were forced to manufacture their own bricks. Of what significance is this information to the overall understanding of the entire episode?

Rashi comments on the verse "of common purpose" that the inhabitants of Bavel conspired against the notion that G-d is the sole power over the entire universe. It was their perception that the world was theirs, devoid of Divine authority, and they conspired to attack the authority that resided in the heavens. The reason for the emphasis on the brick being used as a building material is succinctly captured by the Ibn Ezra who comments on the verse "and the brick served them as stone", saying that they used bricks instead of stone. Their preference for bricks reflected their perception that they were living in a world which they themselves created (when a person bakes bricks, using them to construct his home, they may have the feeling that their abode is separate from G-d, for they themselves have processed the materials used to construct it). They deluded themselves into believing that G-d no longer exercised His authority over this world.

All too often, we ourselves become blinded by mankind's technological advancements. As man progresses in his technological pursuits, he becomes more prone to losing sight of the fact that G-d is the ultimate authority in this world.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And G-d remembered Noach and all of the animals that were with him in the ark." (Beraishis 8:1) "What did He 'remember' regarding the animals? The merit of their not destroying their ways (by mixing with other species) beforehand and that they did not cohabitate in the ark." (Rashi, ibid.)

Rashi seems to be telling us that G-d was rewarding the animals for doing the right thing (or for not doing the wrong thing). In fact, the midrash upon which this Rashi is based (Tanchuma Yoshon, Noach 11) says, "Blessed is the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, who does not withhold (lit. smite) the reward of any creature. Therefore, He remembered them (the animals) with Noach." But how is the concept of reward and punishment applicable to creatures that do not have free will?

This isn't the only time that Rashi tells us that G-d rewards animals. When the Torah tells us to feed the meat of any dead animal found in a field to the dogs (Shemos 22:30), Rashi says that this teaches us that "the Holy One, blessed is He does not withhold the reward of any creature," as this meat is reward for the dogs keeping still during the night of the exodus from Egypt.

The Malbim and the Sha'aray Aharon explain that even though animals do not have the ability to choose between right and wrong, and therefore cannot be deserving of reward, this meat is given to the dogs in order to teach humans that G-d always rewards those who do the right thing. The wording of the Mechilta upon which this Rashi is based (Mishpatim 20) seems to bear this out, as it adds, "if for an animal this is so, surely for a human He will not withhold his reward." However, the wording of "not withholding reward" implies that the reward is deserved, and therefore not held back. If the "reward" for animals is not really deserved (but given for the benefit of the lesson humans can take from it being given), the midrashim should say that G-d rewards all good deeds, not that He doesn't hold back the reward that was earned by any creature. Additionally, if the point of "remembering" the animals on their own merit (and not as a byproduct of remembering Noach) is to teach us this, Rashi should have used the same wording used in Mishpatim, that this shows that G-d doesn't withhold reward from any creature. Instead, Rashi just tells us which actions (or inactions) made the animals deserving of reward! So the original question still stands-how can creatures that do not have the ability to choose right over wrong be "deserving" of reward?

There are two aspects to the reward received for doing a mitzvah. One is the simple concept of reward, getting "paid" for doing good (or punished for doing bad), as a motivational tool. The other is the inherent benefit of doing good, how it leaves a lasting impression on the soul. For example, if two people go to the same shiur (Torah lecture), but one of them has to travel further to get there, assuming the same intellectual capability and attentiveness, they will both get the same benefit for having attended. The fact that one had to do more in order to attend might encourage

trying to accomplish as much as possible once there, but otherwise will have no impact on what is gained from the lecture itself. There will be a separate calculation for the effort made to get there, with every little bit of extra effort bringing extra reward, but this has no direct bearing on the benefit received from the lecture itself. (Similarly, one who wanted to attend, but could not, will not be held accountable for not attending, but will still not receive any of the benefit that would have been achieved had he gone.)

While the effort put into doing a mitzvah will directly impact the spiritual growth of the individual, the benefit from the mitzvah itself, the additional level of holiness realized, if done as well, is not diminished by the ease of doing it. One of the advantages of constantly doing mitzvos is that they become easier to do, without losing their value. Even if it no longer becomes a struggle to do the good deed, the spiritual growth from doing it is still attained.

When Rashi tells us that the animals "deserved" to be remembered along with Noach, it is not because they "chose" to avoid improper activities. After all, animals do not have free will. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that these animals did not mix with other species (and most of them did not cohabitate in the ark), and therefore received the benefit of not suffering the same consequence as the other animals.

Although we must guard against the malady of doing things by rote, we should also put in the effort to put ourselves in the position to accomplish as much as we as can, as easily as we can. By removing as many obstacles from our path of spiritual growth as possible, we will be able to achieve new heights faster, which will then allow for growth to even higher levels.

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

The pesukim in the second chapter of Sefer Bereshis say, "These are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created on the day of Hashem G-d's making of earth and heavens. Now any tree of the field was not yet on the earth and any herb of the field had not yet sprouted, for Hashem G-d had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil." [Bereshis 2:4-5]

A very important Rashi on this pasuk teaches us two novel ideas: On the words "for Hashem G-d had not sent rain", Rashi comments: "And what is the reason that He had not sent rain? Because 'there was no man to work the soil' and there was none who could recognize the goodness of rain." Up until this point, there was no vegetation. There was no vegetation because there was no rain and there was no rain because there was no human being to appreciate the rain!

The Maharal in the Gur Aryeh elaborates: Why not bring rain anyway (even though there was no one to appreciate it)? The answer is because it is forbidden to do a kindness for a person who does not recognize it as a favor. Therefore, as long as there was no man, no rain fell. It is not worth giving a gift or favor to someone who does not even have the ability to appreciate what you are doing for him.

Most of us would have assumed the opposite from the Maharal. Our natural instinct would be to say, "No, give the favor anyway, even if it will not be appreciated. Be a nice guy and do the tova [favor], even though it is not appreciated! The Maharal infers a principle of proper behavior from this Rashi: Do not do a favor for a person who cannot appreciate it.

Rashi then presents another idea: "When Adam came and realized that they (i.e. -- the rains) are a necessity for the world, he prayed for them and they came down, and the trees and types of vegetation sprouted." Rav Shimshon Pincus, z"l, in his wonderful sefer, She'arim B'Tefilla, makes the following comment: All this vegetation was right there -- the shrubs, the trees, the grass, the plants, the flowers, the beautiful earth -- but it was necessary for someone to pray for it. Once Adam prayed for it, then that tremendous favor (of rainfall) comes automatically.

The lesson is that sometimes the Master of the World is ready to shower a bounty on us, but unless we pray for it, we will not receive it. That was the situation over here. The Ribono shel Olam intended that there should be a creation with plants and trees and shrubs and grass and flowers, but He was not prepared to "release them" until someone was there to (a) appreciate them and (b) actually pray for them. There are tremendous favors from Heaven that may await us, but we need to ask for them, we need to daven that G-d's favors be "released" to us.

The Secret To Building A Bayis Ne'eman B'Yisrael

Following the creation of Chava, Adam states: "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called Woman (isha), for from man (ish) was she taken". [Bereshis 2:23]. Then the Torah writes "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh." [Bereshis 2:24]. This last pasuk is the basis of the institution of marriage throughout the world.

Not long ago, I read the autobiography of Rav Yisrael Meir Lau, who has held different Rabbinic positions in Eretz Yisrael, among them the Ashkenazik Chief Rabbi. He has had a fascinating life and wrote an autobiography entitled Do Not Raise A Hand Against the Boy (in the original Hebrew "Al Tishlach Yadcha El Ha'Naar") [based on Bereshis 22:120].

Rav Herschel Schachter (1918-2013) -- who was an Orthodox army chaplain with the U.S. Army

during the liberation of the camps -- found the young Rabbi Lau among a pile of dead bodies. Rabbi Lau became a "poster child" for liberation from the concentration camps. His picture was seen throughout the world -- the five-year-old child who survived the concentration camps! He was one of the youngest survivors when the camps were liberated -- a five year old child in Buchenwald! Both his parents had been killed. Rabbi Lau had a sixteen-year-old brother who saved him during all the trials and tribulations and horror of the concentration camp. It is a very poignant book.

Rabbi Lau traces his whole history of how he got to Eretz Yisrael and how he was taken in by an aunt and an uncle; how he went to Cheder and then how he went to Yeshiva Kol Torah and later the Ponnevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. It is a fascinating book.

Rabbi Lau writes that it came time for him to get married. He was and is a very charismatic, capable, and talented individual. He must have had quite a reputation as a single Yeshiva bochur. There was a Jew at the time who was the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rav Yitzchak Yedidyah Frankel. He was interested in Rav Lau as a son-in-law. He invited Rabbi Lau over for a meal, took him out to the balcony of his home, and began telling him a "vort" [a brief Torah thought]:

Rav Frankel asked him -- what does the pasuk mean, "Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother"? The Torah appears to be rubbing the idea that people leave their parents when they get married into people's faces. What kind of business is this? Parents put in 20-25 years of blood, sweat, and tears in raising their child. Then comes the wedding and it's "bye, bye!" It is almost as if the Torah makes it an obligatory commandment to leave one's parents after getting married. Why does the Torah write this?

I have personally had the privilege of being under many Chupahs; inasmuch as I am often asked to be mesader kiddushin [officiate] at the weddings of my students. There is a universal emotion that I invariably notice. The Chosson and Kallah are all smiles and the parents are bawling their eyes out. I always think of telling the young couple: "Wait, 20+ years from now, you are going to be the ones who are bawling your eyes out!" What is the reason for this ubiquitous emotion?

Of course, there is an element of these being "tears of joy"; but there is so much effort and so much emotion put into the endeavor of raising a child that invariably there is sadness at the event marking the child's permanent departure from the parental home. In a certain sense, the parents have the feeling -- "It is over." That stage of life has now ended.

So what is the purpose of this pasuk (al ken ya'azov ish es aviv v'imo)? Why does the Torah emphasize it?

Rav Yitzchak Yedidyah Frankel told his future son-in-law, homiletically, that while in Hebrew the root of the word "azav" means leave, the Hebrew word for 'inheritance' is also the word izavon. Therefore, he suggested that the interpretation of the pasuk "al ken ya'azov..." is that everyone should leave their parents, but that he should take with him the izavon -- the heritage of his parents. The pasuk is not talking about the monetary inheritance of one's parents, but rather the values of what he saw in his parents' house. To be successful in building a new Jewish home, a man must take with him the values he has seen in his own parental home.

Why did Rav Frankel tell the young Rabbi Lau this vort? He told him, "You are a fine eligible young man; but you are an orphan. You were raised in an institution. My only worry about you is that you won't have a tradition from your parents of how to build a home. You were not old enough to appreciate how your father treated your mother, to see how your mother treated your father, to see how you treat siblings, and so on and so forth. This is my worry about you."

Rabbi Lau writes that he almost chocked up on the spot when Rabbi Frankel told him this and I do not understand why Rabbi Frankel needed to tell this to his future son-in-law. The concept is a beautiful concept: Every Jewish child, in order to be able to build a new home, must take with him the izavon, the heritage of his family. This is the precondition for being able to successfully cling to one's wife and to build a new home on one's own. This is the secret to success in building a Bayis Ne'eman B'Yisrael. *© 2016 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org*