

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Amid all the drama of the impending flood and the destruction of almost all of creation, we focus on Noah building the ark, and hear one detailed instruction: Make a tzohar for the ark and terminate it within a cubit of the top. (Gen. 6:16)

There is a difficulty understanding what “tzohar” means, since the word does not appear anywhere else in Tanach. Everyone agrees that it is referring to a source of illumination. It will give light within the ark itself. But what exactly is it? Rashi quotes a Midrash in which two Rabbis disagree as to its meaning: Some say this was a window; others say that it was a precious stone that gave light to them.¹

The precious stone had the miraculous quality of being able to generate light within the darkness. Bartenura suggests that what is at stake between the two interpretations is the etymology of the word tzohar itself. One relates it to the word tzaharayim, meaning “midday.” In that case, the brightness was to come from the sun, the sky, the outside. Therefore tzohar means “a window, a skylight.” The other view is that tzohar is related to zohar, “radiance,” which suggests something that radiates its own light, hence the idea of a miraculous precious stone.

Chizkuni and others suggest Noah had both: a window (from which he later released the raven, Gen. 8:6) and some form of artificial lighting for the prolonged period of the flood itself when the sun was completely overcast by cloud and the world was shrouded in darkness.

It remains fascinating to ask why the Rabbis of the Midrash, and Rashi himself, would spend time on a question that has no practical relevance. There will be – God promised this in this week’s parsha – no further flood. There will be no new Noah. In any future threat to the existence of the planet, an ark floating on the water will not be sufficient to save humankind. So why should it matter what source of illumination Noah had in the ark during those tempestuous days? What is the lesson for the generations?

I would like to offer a midrashic speculation. The answer, I suggest, lies in the history of the Hebrew language. Throughout the biblical era, the word tevah

meant an ark – large in the case of Noah and the flood, small in the case of the papyrus basket coated with tar in which Yocheved placed the baby Moses, setting him afloat on the Nile (Ex. 2:3). More generally, it means “box.” However, by the time of the Midrash, tevah had come also to mean “word.”

It seems to me that the Rabbis of the Midrash were not so much commenting on Noah and the ark as they were reflecting on a fundamental question of Torah. Where and what is the tzohar, the brightness, the source of illumination, for the tevah, the Word? Does it come solely from within, or also from without? Does the Torah come with a window or a precious stone?

There were certainly those who believed that Torah was self-sufficient. If something is difficult in Torah it is because the words of Torah are sparse in one place but rich in another.² In other words, the answer to any question in Torah can be found elsewhere in Torah. Turn it over and turn it over for everything is within it.³ This is probably the majority view, considered historically. There is nothing to be learned outside. The Torah is illuminated by a precious stone that generates its own light. This is even hinted at in the title of the greatest work of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar (see Bartenura above).

There were, however, other views. Most famously, Maimonides believed that a knowledge of science and philosophy – a window to the outside world – was essential to understanding God’s word. He made the radical suggestion, in the Mishnah Torah (Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah 2:2), that it was precisely these forms of study that were the way to the love and fear of God. Through science – the knowledge of “He who spoke and called the universe into existence” – we gain a sense of the majesty and beauty, the almost infinite scope and intricate detail of creation and thus of the Creator. That is the source of love. Then, realizing how small we are and how brief our lives in the total scheme of things: that is the source of fear.



¹ Genesis Rabbah 31:11.

² Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 3:5.

³ Mishnah Avot 5:22.

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The case Maimonides made in the 12th century, long before the rise of science, has been compounded a thousand times with our accelerated knowledge of the nature of the universe. Every new discovery of the vastness of the cosmos and the wonders of the micro-cosmos, fills the mind with awe. "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?" (Is. 40:26).

Maimonides did not think that science and philosophy were secular disciplines. He believed that they were ancient forms of Jewish wisdom, that the Greeks had acquired from the Jews and sustained at a time when the Jewish people, through exile and dispersion, had forgotten them. So they were not foreign borrowings. Maimonides was re-claiming a tradition that had been born in Israel itself. Nor were they source of independent illumination. They were simply a window through which the light of God's created universe could help us decode the Torah itself. Understanding God's world helps us understand God's word.

This made a significant difference to the way Maimonides was able to convey the truth of Torah. So for example, his knowledge of ancient religious practices – albeit based on sources that were not always reliable – afforded him the deep insight (in *The Guide for the Perplexed*) that many of the Chukim, the statutes, the laws that seem to have no reason, were in fact directed against specific idolatrous practices.

His knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy enabled him to formulate an idea that exists throughout both Tanach and the rabbinic literature, but that had not been articulated so clearly before, namely that Judaism has a virtue ethic. It is interested not just in what we do but in what we are, in the kind of people we become. That is the basis of his pathbreaking *Hilchot De'ot*, "Laws of ethical character."

The more we understand the way the world is, the more we understand why the Torah is as it is. It is our roadmap through reality. It is as if secular and scientific knowledge were the map, and Torah the route.

This view, articulated by Maimonides, was developed in the modern age in a variety of forms. Devotees of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch called it Torah im derech erez, "Torah with general culture." In

Yeshiva University it came to be known as Torah u-Madda, "Torah and science." Together with the late Rav Aaron Lichtenstein zt"l, I prefer the phrase Torah ve-Chochmah, "Torah and wisdom," because wisdom is a biblical category.

Recently, the science writer David Epstein published a fascinating book called *Range*, subtitled, *How Generalists Triumph in a Specialised World*.⁴ He makes the point that over-concentration on a single specialised topic is good for efficiency but bad for creativity. The real creatives, (people like the Nobel prize winners), are often those who had outside interests, who knew other disciplines, or had passions and hobbies outside their subject. Even in a field like sport, for every Tiger Woods, who had a feel for golf even before he could speak, there is a Roger Federer, who exercised his skills in many sports before, quite late in youth, choosing to focus on tennis.

Lehavdil, it was precisely Maimonides' breadth of knowledge of science, medicine, psychology, astronomy, philosophy, logic, and many other fields that allowed him to be so creative in everything he wrote, from his letters, to his Commentary to the Mishnah, to the Mishnah Torah itself, structured differently from any other code of Jewish law, all the way to *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides said things that many may have sensed before, but no one had expressed so cogently and powerfully. He showed that it is possible to be utterly devoted to Jewish faith and law and yet be creative, showing people spiritual and intellectual depths they had not seen before. That was his way making a tzohar, a window for the tevah, the Divine word.

On the other hand, the Zohar conceives of Torah as a precious stone that gives light of itself and needs none from the outside. Its world is a closed system, a very deep, passionate, moving, sustained search for intimacy with the Divine that dwells within the universe and within the human soul.

So we are not forced to choose either the one or the other. Recall that Chizkuni said that Noah had a precious stone for the dark days and a window for when the sun shone again. Something like that happened when it came to Torah also. During the dark days of persecution, Jewish mysticism flourished, and Torah was illuminated from within. During the benign days when the world was more open to Jews, they had a window to the outside, and so emerged figures like Maimonides in the Middle Ages, and Samson Raphael Hirsch in the 19th century.

I believe that the challenge for our time is to open a series of windows so that the world can illuminate our understanding of Torah, and so that the Torah may guide us as we seek to make our way through the world. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable*

⁴ David Epstein, *Range*, Macmillan, 2019.

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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." (Genesis 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, God 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 God 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 God 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 God the Most High, brings him bread and wine and blesses God 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 God 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 God 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 Torah, in this week's reading, describes the rainbow as becoming the symbol of God's covenant with the humankind, that the world will not be destroyed by another flood. The appearance of the rainbow in the narrative of Noach and his emergence from the ark does not mean that the rainbow was created then. According to rabbinic tradition and the unchanging laws of nature, the rainbow existed from the time of original creation itself. What is significant is that the Torah points out to Noach that the rainbow now has a great significance to humanity and is not to be observed and thought of as being merely another of the great many phenomena that we call nature.

Rather, when human beings see a rainbow, they should be reminded of God's covenant with us and how we are all descended from one family that was the progenitor of humankind, as we know it today. One of the interesting things about the rainbow is that when Jews view it, they are bidden to recite a blessing. This is meant to teach us that the wonders of nature are constant reminders of our relationship to our Creator and our obligations that that entails. Because of this, Jewish tradition also teaches us that we are not to stare at length or directly at a rainbow because the rainbow represents God's presence in our world and should not be subject to prolonged stares.

This lesson is true in all areas of human life and in our relationship to nature. Pantheism promulgated the idea that nature itself is God. That is a misrepresentation of the true relationship between the Creator and what was created. Judaism teaches us that we are to see the wonders of the planet that we inhabit as part of God's scheme in creating the world and that we react to seeing those wonders through the prism of the Torah that the Lord has granted to Israel.

Viewing nature without Torah insight and background is again reverting to pantheism. That is the meaning of the Mishnah in Avot that one should not interrupt one's study of Torah in order to admire a beautiful phenomenon of nature. Nature is to be viewed through knowledge and understanding of Torah and not as something that is distinct and unrelated to Torah and its values.

Seeing nature devoid of any moral backdrop diminishes the wonders of nature and the grandeur of

the world in which we live. A rainbow without the message of the Lord to Noach loses much of its beauty and a great deal of its meaning. In the Talmud we find that great and noble people were themselves compared to the rainbow, because in a noble person one can also link the nature of the Creator that fashions that person. Everything in life and in nature, as well as our judgment of human beings should always be viewed from the perspective of Torah and eternity. ©2019 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 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 God.

Consider our relationship with God. At times we become disillusioned with God's ways. This may lead to doubting the Almighty. Sa'adia Gaon suggests that rather allowing the doubt to destroy our belief in God, 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 God has hurt us in certain ways, but when we pan back we are able to look and see how much God 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 God 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. ©2019 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

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 Teverya 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 Yadayim", 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 "Netilat Yadayim" is because of the sulfur content which makes it unfit for eating. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Man and the World After the Flood

After the Flood, the Torah tells us, "And Elokim blessed Noach and his sons and He said to them be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you will be on all the beasts of the land, and upon every bird in the heavens, on everything that moves on earth and all the fish of the sea, in your hand they are given. Every moving thing that lives shall be yours for food, like herbal greenery I have given you everything. But flesh with its soul, its blood you shall not eat (Rashi translation, see later for explanation). But your blood of your souls I will demand, of every beast will I demand it, but of man, of man for his brother, I will demand the soul of man. Whoever spills out blood of man, among man, his blood shall be spilled, for in the image of Elokim He made man. And you be fruitful and multiply, teem on the earth and multiply on it."

Our Rabbis speak of two separate commandments. Noach is told "be fruitful and multiply," which is concerned with the population. The second commandment, "and fill the earth," is to spread that population throughout the world. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch compares this first commandment with the one given to the first man. Adam HaRishon (the first man) was commanded, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and all the living things that move on the earth." There are two phrases that are present with Adam that are missing by Noach: "conquer it and subdue it." Hirsch continues: (1) "be fruitful" is marriage, the union of the sexes to produce an independent being, (2) "multiply" is the family which involves both the production of children as well as the nurturing and caring for them, the aftercare and the development of this offspring is the real factor

in the increase of the human race, (3) "fill" is society, the establishment of not only one's own family but of other families to create a viable society, (4) "conquer it" is the mastering of the world around us to be able to produce new materials or objects or crops to further the goals of the society, the families, and the individuals, (5) "subdue" is not to be understood as subduing animals to submit to man but to control the animal kingdom in order that it should benefit all."

This new relationship to the world has an effect on the ability of man to corrupt it. The physical changes in the world and the diminishing lifespan of man insured that Man would separate into greater diversity and "quicker change-about in the character of generations could be effected." Man's goal shifted from mastering the world to ennobling himself. As we see, the change in the instruction to Noach, which leaves off the idea of conquering and subduing the world, now is focused entirely on improving himself as an individual and then improving his family and his society. The bond that had existed between man and animal was broken and animals now were to fear man and dread man. "The fear of you and the dread of you will be on all the beasts of the land, and upon every bird in the heavens, on everything that moves on earth and all the fish of the sea, in your hand they are given."

Man originally was a vegetarian because he was to work together with animals to fill the world. This changed with the new environment after the flood. The Or HaChaim asks why animals were not given as food for Adam HaRishon but were now permitted to Noach and his children. The Or HaChaim gives three reasons for this permission: (1) Hashem gave Noach the responsibility of saving all animals and without his efforts they could not have been saved, (2) Noach had to work very hard for an entire year to help the animals survive and this was a reward for him, and (3) Hashem wanted Noach to bring Him a sacrifice for the covenant of the Rainbow and this sacrifice was to be eaten. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin says the permission to eat meat was because the generation of the Flood was guilty of two great sins: stealing and inappropriate sexual behavior. Man's did not understand his special place in the world and his appropriate path to take in life. He looked to the animals for instruction and saw that the male animals took many wives and discarded them at will so he did the same. Just as animals eat the grasses of the field without regard to its ownership, Man had no respect for the property of others or the wives of others. After the Flood, Man needed to separate himself from the animals and assume the superior role for which he was created. Man was to eat from the animals and rule over them. The Kli Yakar explains that all of this was part of a new relationship between Man and the animals. The animals now were to fear Man, for Man would kill them for food. The Kli Yakar asks why the ox goes willingly to the butcher

rather than refusing to cooperate with his master. He answers that this is Hashem's Will that the ox should fear Man and do what he wants.

The permission to eat meat did not come at the same time as the prohibition to eat the blood of the animal. Rashi translates the sentence, "But flesh with its soul, its blood you shall not eat." According to Rashi, this is the commandment to the B'nei Noach, the children of Noach, to not eat a limb which was detached from a living animal while it was still alive. "All the while that its soul is in it, you shall not eat the flesh." Rashi does not limit the prohibition against eating the blood of an animal to eating the blood of an animal while it is still alive. The Ramban argues with Rashi saying in that case the Torah should have said, "flesh, so long as there is life in it, and also its blood you shall not eat." The Ramban understands that there was no restriction to eat the blood of the animal for Noach) as long as the animal was already dead. Hirsch says that Noach's descendants were not forbidden to eat blood as that was a later commandment which applied to the B'nei Yisrael alone. The B'nei Noach were only commanded against eating a part of an animal that was taken while it was still alive. Hirsch also explains that the Torah did not wish us to approach blood as if it were the soul of the animal, for when the blood was spilled it would mean that the soul was also destroyed. The blood is to be considered merely an instrument, an agent of the soul.

Man has a tremendous responsibility in his role as Hashem's representative on earth. All of one's actions towards the animals of the world, the other people who dwell with him, and the environment in which we all live, must be governed by this concept of representing Hashem. Our major concern for ourselves and for others must also encompass the needs of animals and the needs of the environment, not only because each affects the other but because that is the responsibility with which we were blessed. May we be worthy of this responsibility. © 2019 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states, "Noah was a completely righteous man in his generation" (Gen. 6:9). The Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 108a, is bothered by the seemingly superfluous words "in his generation." What are these extra words coming to teach us?

There are two opinions: 1) Praise of Noah. Even in an evil generation he was righteous. However, if he were in a righteous generation, he would have been even more righteous. 2) Denigration of Noah. In his own generation he was considered righteous, but had he lived in Avraham's generation he would not have been considered righteous in comparison to Avraham.

The Chasam Sofer, a great rabbi, explained

that there really is no argument between the two opinions. If Noah would have stayed the way he was in his own generation, then in Avraham's generation he would not have been considered that righteous. However, the reality is that Noah would have been influenced by Avraham and have reached even greater heights of righteousness.

What do we learn from this? We are all affected by our environment. When we are close to people of good character, we are automatically influenced in positive directions. Choose well your friends and your community -- they strongly impact your life! *Dvar Torah Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*
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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

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

In order to appreciate this association, let us analyze Noah's role during the flood and Hashem's response to it. The Torah tells us in the beginning of our Sidra that the flood was sent because humanity turned totally inwards. The Torah states, "And the land was corrupt before Hashem and the land was full of robbery." (Breishis 6:11) All of mankind became focused on themselves satisfying all of their personal pursuits without taking anyone else's privileges and rights into consideration. They regarded everyone and their possessions permissible to themselves in order to satisfy their personal interests and desires. Humanity was literally destroying itself with every person concerned only for himself, showing no care or respect for anyone else. During the months of the flood it became Noah's sole responsibility to restore morality to the world. The prevalent principles and policies in the

Ark, Noah's world, had to be kindness and compassion. Every moment spent there had to be filled with caring and sharing. Hashem therefore charged Noah with the overwhelming responsibility of providing and tending to the needs of every living being in the Ark. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108B see Maharsha ad loc.) relates a conversation between Noah's son, Shem, and Eliezer wherein Shem stated that he never formally went to sleep throughout the twelve months he was in the Ark. Noah's family was totally preoccupied with their magnanimous chore of continuously following the varied feeding schedules of each living being. In this way, the family was totally involved in acts of kindness, providing for others every moment of their stay. This total reversal of priorities, placing their entire focus on the needs of others reestablished the world. In fact, our Chazal in the Midrash (Breishis Rabba 33:4) understand this to be the single merit through which the flood waters ended and Noah's family was permitted to leave the Ark and reenter the world.

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

In view of this, Yeshaya draws our attention to this guarantee and states in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may jar and the hills may shift but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never falter." (54:10) As we have seen regarding Noah's kindness, Hashem promises to respond to our kindness with a similar unconditional guarantee. This kindness means that Hashem will never respond to our shortcoming with expressions of anger. Irrespective of our behavior, never again will the Jewish people experience exile and other similar

manifestations of Hashem's wrath. Once the Jewish people return to Eretz Yisroel, never again will Hashem remove His sacred presence from their midst. Hashem's kindness is eternal and after the Jewish people will receive His promise of kindness, it will be an unconditional and everlasting one.

This insight reveals to us the hidden message of Chazal and profoundly reflects upon the affluence of our generation. Chazal (see Rashi, Breishis 12:2) inform us of the character of the generation preceding Mashiach. They explain Hashem's introductory Bracha to Avrohom Avinu stated in the beginning of Lech Lecha in the following manner. There will be certain generations wherein Hashem's influence will be realized through our acts of kindness, others through our acts of devotion and sacrifice and others through our commitment to Torah and truth. But in the era which precedes Mashiach the prevalent virtue will be kindness. (based on the reflections of HoRav HaGaon Rav Shimon Shkop z"l) This particular era distinguishes itself by being the launching pad for the era of Mashiach. This preceding era and its merits must secure the coming of Mashiach and all associated blessings. Amongst the blessings of Mashiach's times is Hashem's promise to shower us with His everlasting kindness, guaranteeing our eternal stay in Eretz Yisroel. But this commitment of everlasting kindness will only come in response to our selfless and personal commitment to unconditional kindness. This explains why never before has the opportunity of kindness availed itself to the Jewish people in such extraordinary proportions as in our days. Yes, with our generation accepting its responsibility and displaying of loving kindness we will deserve Hashem's unconditional response of His everlasting kindness. Yeshaya therefore points us to the flood and assures us that, as Hashem responded to Noach's kindness with His unconditional guarantee we should realize wholeheartedly that Hashem will also respond to our kindness with that same unconditional guarantee and shower His blessing upon His people for eternity.

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RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Weekly Dvar

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 Hashem, for they themselves have processed the materials used to construct it). They deluded themselves into believing that Hashem 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. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

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. ©2015 Rabbi E. Scheller