

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

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 God's words to Noah: "Then God 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 God), 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 God 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

rebuilding a shattered world, you do not wait for permission. God 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 God began the Jewish people not with Noah but with Abraham. Noah, says the Torah, "walked with God" (6:9). But God 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)

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.

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 God 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 God is with us, giving us strength if we align our will with His. Faith is not certainty, but the courage to live with uncertainty. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt”l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z”l and rabbisacks.org*



RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The greater a person is or believes he or she is, the smaller the room for error in one's life decisions. Had Noach been merely Mr. Noach, his choice of beginning the world again with a vineyard and wine would have been acceptable and even understandable. After all, the trauma of the destruction of so many human beings in the waters of the great flood required some sort of release of tension and an escape mechanism. But he was not just plain Noach when the Lord commanded him to build his ark and restart humanity.

He was Noach, the righteous man of his generation, the person who represented goodness and service to God and humanity. He was special, an exalted person who overcame the influences of a wicked and dissolute society and withstood its ridicule and insults. A person of such noble character and pious nature should not begin the rebuilding of human society with vineyards and wine.

It sent the wrong message to his progeny and through them to all later generations as well. Holy people are to be held to holy standards of behavior and endeavor. There are no one-size fits all in ethical and moral standards of behavior. The rabbis of Midrash taught us that with a greater human capacity for holiness there is a commensurate capacity for dissolute behavior as well.

The Talmud states that it is the scholarly righteous who have the strongest evil inclination within them. The responsibility for spiritual greatness is commensurate with the capacity for the holy greatness of each individual person. This is why Noach finds himself criticized by Midrash, and later Jewish biblical commentators, in spite of the Torah's glowing compliments paid to him in its initial description.

A person of the stature of Noach should not be found drunk and disheveled in his tent, an inviting figure for the debauchery of his own offspring. The failure of greatness is depressing. As King Solomon put it: “If the flame has consumed the great cedars, then what else can be the fate of the hyssop of the wall?”

Greatness carries with it enormous burdens and fateful consequences. As we pride ourselves on being the “chosen people” we are held by Heaven to behave and live our lives as being a chosen people. Wine and drunkenness will not suffice for a nation that is destined to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a special people.

Burdened by this greatness the Jewish people have fallen short of the mark numerous times in our history. But we have always risen again to attempt to fulfill our destiny and realize our potential. It is this characteristic of resilience, inherited from our father Abraham, that has been the key to our survival. We

have constantly dealt with great ideas and issues. Drunkenness, whether physical or spiritual, has never been a trait of Jewish society. We are aware of the story and fate of Noach, but we pursue the greatness of Abraham as our goal in life. ©2022 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Noah may have been righteous and wholehearted as an individual, but he lacked the strength and the boldness to confront God's decision and to oppose the wicked ways of the world.

"Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noah walked together with God" (Gen. 6:9)

If, indeed, Noah was a righteous, wholehearted partner of God, why is he not the first Hebrew? He seems to have had all of the necessary qualifications.

The classical biblical commentary Rashi generally follows the midrash in praising every one of the biblical personalities, even those who do not come off so well in a simple reading of the biblical text. In the case of Noah, however, Rashi cites a midrash that turns great praise into shameful degradation.

While the Bible states unambiguously that Noah was "a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations," Rashi comments, "And there are those who explicate this phrase to Noah's detriment: In accordance with his generation, he was righteous; had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered anything at all" (Rashi, citing BT Sanhedrin 108).

Why this denigration when the Bible itself is so complimentary? Rashi and the midrash even take the next phrase, "He [Noah] walked together with God," to indicate that Noah was lacking: "In the case of Abraham, the Bible says, 'Walk before Me and be wholehearted' (Gen. 17:1). Noah required Divine support to uphold him, whereas Abraham was strong and progressed with his righteousness on his own [without any need of external support]" (Gen. Raba 30:10).

What could possibly cause these commentaries to overlook the positive and seek out the negative? The Maharal of Prague magnificently explains that Abraham and Noah each faced a similar challenge, but they reacted in radically different ways.

When God informs Abraham that he is going to destroy the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham immediately challenges the decision and actually debates with the Lord Himself: "Will You then destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there

are 50 righteous... will You destroy and not forgive the place because of those 50 righteous... [should] the Judge of the entire earth not act justly?... And perhaps there are 45... or 40... or 30... or 20... or 10?" (Gen. 18:23-32)

Abraham charges God with injustice and then bargains with God as if the Almighty were a market vendor, in order to save the wicked city of Sodom.

But Noah, when confronted with the prospect of a flood destroying all of humanity, is quite satisfied to accept God's decision and build an ark to save only himself and his immediate family. Apparently the first Hebrew must be concerned for all of humanity. Noah's lack of human sensitivity left him wanting in God's eyes. That's precisely what the midrash says: Had Noah lived in Abraham's generation and been compared to him, he would not have been considered anything at all.

It goes even further than that, however. God actually gives in to Abraham's demand. He says specifically, "I will not destroy [Sodom] because of even 10 righteous people" (Gen. 18:32).

But as the Torah reports, there were not even 10 righteous in the city: "The men of Sodom surrounded the house [to sodomize the strangers], from the youth to the aged, the entire people from end to end [of the city]" (Gen. 19:4).

God even invites Abraham to enter into dialogue with Him, saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17)

God then goes on to declare that He has elected Abraham as the first Hebrew because of his sense of justice and righteousness, before inviting Abraham to argue with Him on the basis of these concepts (Gen. 18:18-22).

The point is clear: To be the elected of God, one must stand strong against the injustices of the world. God recognizes that the world is not perfect; He wants us to complete and perfect it. He wants us to force Him to intercede to make certain that the good and the compassionate triumph over the evil and the destructive. He doesn't want us to accept the world as He created it; He doesn't want us to accept human nature in the fullness of its evil potential. Noah apparently did not believe that humanity had the power to repent. Abraham believed that even Sodom was ultimately redeemable.

Noah may have been righteous and wholehearted as an individual, but he lacked the strength and the boldness to confront God's decision and to oppose the wicked ways of the world. This characteristic is built into his name, which means "ease." Rashi says that he received that name because he created an easier method of reaping wheat from the ground. God elects the one who challenges Him and is willing to go to war to fight the evil terrorists who captured Lot. God wants us to swim against the current, to put our lives on the line, in order to perfect

the world in the Kingship of the Divine. That's what it means to be a Hebrew (Ivri): to stand in opposition on one side (ever in Hebrew), even if everyone – even God – stands on the other. ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Corruption and Evil

One must wonder how the earth had strayed so far from Hashem that He decided to destroy it. In a period of ten generations, the people and the animals and other creatures had abandoned the limits placed on them and their very nature that were a vital part of their creation. Only those creatures who were true to these limits could be saved. The Torah is clear in its message: “Now the earth had become corrupt before Elokim (God as Judge); and the earth had become filled with robbery (evil, violence). And Elokim saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. Elokim said to Noach, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold I am about to destroy them from the earth.”

The Hebrew term, “shachat, corruption,” from which the verb “tishacheit” is derived, is most often referring to sexual immorality. Rashi explains that humans no longer considered that a woman was limited to her husband but would have many partners. Men also did not treat marriage as a binding contract. For the animals, though they were never commanded about marriage, the Ramban tells us that they were commanded about relations only within their own species. When humans set a different example, the animals expanded on that evil and did not limit their partners to their own species.

The Ramban defined the word “chamas” to mean both robbery and fraud. The Ramban suggest that the general categories of both “shachat, sexual immorality,” and “chamas, robbery and fraud,” belong under the general category of injustice. The Or HaChaim explains that the term “chamas” is a general category that contains all forms of evil within it. It includes robbery, illicit sexual relations, the spilling of blood, and the worshipping of idols and other gods. Since the Or HaChaim only specified the worst of the major sins, it is likely that he included the many variations of minor sins that, in themselves, would not have caused Hashem to destroy the world by the Flood, but when added together, proved to be an overwhelming factor in His decision.

One question that is asked by the Rabbis is why Hashem chose to destroy the world at this time. Surely the evil behavior of the people was present for a long time, yet Hashem held His patience. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin gives us an insight. The evil behaviors of immoral relations and robbery (fraud) continued to multiply until which point the people no

longer saw these behaviors as going against nature, but the very essence of nature. The people did not feel that they needed to justify their behavior, they framed their judgment based on what they viewed to be normal behavior, even though that behavior went against what the Torah tells us was Hashem's instructions to both man and beast when He created them. This fits nicely with the opinion of HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, who describes the “shachat, corruption” as “the overthrow of a good condition, and the impeding of progress, and the changing into the opposite of anything which was meant to thrive and prosper.” That is why a form of the word, shachat, is also used to define the punishment that Hashem issues, which “corrupts” the beautiful world He created.

The Kli Yakar reminds us that the word, Elokim, can be translated as either The Judge (Hashem), the quality of Justice, or as human judges. He explains that when the Torah tells us that “the earth (land) had become corrupt before Elokim,” the Torah was speaking about human judges, not The Judge. Hirsch explains that “chamas” is too “petty to be caught by human justice, ein yotzei b'dinim, but if committed continuously, can gradually ruin your fellow-man.” The Kli Yakar uses a comparison to the people of Sodom who both understood the Law and how to manipulate the Law for their own purposes. He posits the idea that a person would steal from many different people, but always less than the minimal amount that would require retribution (less than the value of a perutah). The judges saw this blatant manipulation of the Law and understood that the thieves could not be punished, since each act was less than the required amount for a trial. The judges cried, and their tears rose up to Hashem and awaited His Justice. Since their tears went up before Hashem, our translation of “before Elokim” carries both the idea of human judges and Hashem.

The Ramban is troubled by the phrase, “for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.” He disagrees with Rashi's explanation that this phrase means that animals and birds also became corrupted in their sexual relations “by consorting with other species.” The Ramban translates “chamas” as “violence,” and explains that one cannot say that each species of animals, birds, and man were violent, as animals are not violent except instinctively for protection or food. He also explains that the people did not need a warning before this judgment as violence is universally understood to be a sin. “It is evil committed against both heaven and mankind.”

Hirsch describes the Ark which would save the few whom Hashem had decided to rebuild the population of the world. “It also serves as means of saving a person from the water. ...its shape is that of a box and not a boat. Its shape is broad at the bottom and tapering at the top, the reverse of the shape of a

boat. For it is not designed at all to cleave through the waters, but to be borne by them.”

No mention of fish and other creatures of the waters is found in the story of the Flood. Hashem used the word “*aretz*, earth or land” six times within a few sentences. This is an indication that the destruction of society that is described in the Torah was limited to those animals and birds that were found on land. Fish and other sea creatures are not mentioned in this section. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the fish were never commanded about sexual relations other than the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply. Since they were not commanded about sexual relations, and the concept of robbery or fraud was foreign to them, they were not subject to the punishment and destruction. The Midrash explains that the area around the Ark was cooler than the boiling hot water of the Flood, and the fish swam near the Ark and were saved.

Unfortunately, it is not difficult to compare the society of Noach’s time and the misrepresentation and redefinitions of morality today. Hashem did not create a perfect world, for He desired that Man should perfect it through His Torah. What many today refer to as “*tikkun olam*, the perfection of the world” is often devoid of Torah as the foundation for that “perfection.” We must not mimic the generation of Noach by redefining difficult problems as proper behavior. We must remember to use only the Torah as our definition of Good. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

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Hot Springs of Tiberias

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

“**A**ll the fountains of the deep opened” (*Bereishit* 7:1). This is how the Torah describes the beginning of the flood. However, at the conclusion of the flood the Torah states: “And the fountains of the deep closed” (8:2), omitting the word “all.” Our Sages derive from this that not all the fountains of the deep were closed. Those which benefit humanity, such as the hot springs of Tiberias (*Chamei Teverya*), were left open (Rashi).

When Jewish law speaks of cooking, it is limited to cooking over a fire or any derivative thereof. This is true whether the subject is cooking on Shabbat, roasting the Paschal lamb, or cooking milk with meat.

Since the Torah prohibition of cooking on Shabbat is limited to cooking with fire, one is not liable for cooking with the hot springs of Teverya or the sun (Rashi on *Shabbat* 39a). If we could harness the sun’s heat to cook on Shabbat, normative *halacha* might permit it (*Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchetah*, chapter 1, note 127).

Some say that if a non-Jew uses *Chamei Teverya* to cook food, it may still be eaten by a Jew. Since the heat source is not fire, the food is not considered to have been cooked by the non-Jew (and

thus it is not forbidden on the grounds of *bishul akum*). Nevertheless, all agree that if non-kosher food is cooked in a pot using *Chamei Teverya* as the heat source, both the pot and the food become forbidden. Does this mean that the people of Teverya can save on their electric bills by using *Chamei Teverya* to *kasher* their kitchen items before Pesach? Not necessarily. Some maintain that if a pot absorbed the taste of prohibited food while on the fire, it can be rid of it only by fire, following the principle of “*Kebol’o kach polto*” (“An item ‘spits out’ absorbed food in the same way that it absorbed it”). If so, *Chamei Teverya* would not count for *kashering* purposes.

Another interesting tidbit: women may use *Chamei Teverya* for purification purposes, but it may not be used for *netilat yadayim* (hand-washing before a meal). This is because hot water may be used for *netilat yadayim* only if the water started out cold and was later heated up. In contrast, water which was always hot (as is the case with *Chamei Teverya*) cannot be used for *netilat yadayim*. Some say that *Chamei Teverya* cannot be used for *netilat yadayim* because of its sulfur content, which makes it unfit to drink. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At the conclusion of the deluge, God proclaims that “while the earth remains...day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). Rashi quotes the Midrash, which deduces from this verse that the natural progression of day and night ceased to exist during the time of the flood (*Bereishit Rabbah* 34:11).

Since this verse mentions day before night, Rashbam’s position that, at creation, day preceded night makes sense (Rashbam, Genesis 1:5, 1:8). Before the deluge, we were “sun people,” with the day being paramount. Only much later, after we left Egypt, did God proclaim that we were to become “moon people” – that day begins at night.

Now, of course, while we “moon people” count by the lunar calendar, the sun has its place in our calculations. Every few years, we add a thirteenth month so the holidays fall in their right season (e.g., Passover as a spring festival) – dependent on the sun. Nonetheless, the moon remains paramount.

What is the conceptual difference between the sun and moon? It has been noted that the sun represents sameness, as it is always the same shape. Kohelet writes, “There is nothing new under the sun” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9). In other words, tomorrow is no different from today; today is no different from yesterday – as it was, so it will always be.

The moon, however, fluctuates in apparent shape. It diminishes and eventually vanishes, only to reappear. Thus *chodesh*, the Hebrew word for the lunar month, is similar to *chadash*, which means new. The

moon teaches that we have the power to renew ourselves, which explains why the moon is associated with love. For love to endure, it needs a dimension of novelty, discovering afresh new aspects of our beloved's personality.

So, too, more broadly in life: life becomes stale when today is limited to repeating precisely what we did yesterday. Every day, every week, every month, every year, every stage of life should be welcomed as inspiring a new spirit, a new dimension of life.

So while we were originally "sun people," we became "moon people" – living by the natural evolution of the moon but tempered by the sameness of the sun. As the Psalmist writes, "Sing to the Lord a new song" (Psalms 96:1) – not just a song, but a new song. ©2022 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

Take for yourself from all food that can be eaten, and gather it to you, and it shall be for you and for them to eat." (Beraishis 6:21) Simply understood, since there were all sorts of eaters, there had to be all sorts of things for them to eat. Now, the question of what predators would eat, since they normally ate other creatures, isn't such a compelling one, explain the commentaries, because when one has no other choice, he will eat grass or whatever he can find.

Noach, here, was commanded to gather the various types, however, to do his best to provide for each animal what it normally ate. (There is a Midrash which relates there was a small worm who wouldn't eat, until they realized it liked to eat dough.) Though there was no way for Noach to be able to bring enough food for them all, he was tasked with trying to accommodate them as best as possible.

Not only that, the Klei Yakar says that the words, "take for yourself," are similar to those regarding lulav, and mean that Noach had to use his own money for this. Even though the people of the world would be destroyed, and their wealth would go with them, Noach was not allowed to take it.

[Note: This is similar to the disagreement of the shepherds of Avraham and Lot, as Avraham's servants would not take anything that wasn't his, while Lot's servants felt that since Avraham would inherit the land, and Lot was his heir, they could avail themselves of things now.]

These guidelines must have made it very difficult for Noach. He had to use the limited funds he had to obtain foods of all sorts, and be ready to feed himself, his family, and the entire animal kingdom! But that was the point.

Explains the Klei Yakar, these were intended to increase the miracle. Though usually Hashem seeks to camouflage His acts, here He wanted Noach to see that Hashem would send His blessing to the storehouses and fill up the needs of the creatures on the ark. However, the blessing didn't release Noach from his obligation to make his best efforts to provide food for his family and the various animals. He still had to buy it, bring it, and store it in the ark, and THEN Hashem blessed it.

The point of Noach's efforts was not because Hashem could not provide for them all without Noach's help. Rather, it was Hashem showing Noach that man does not base his efforts on whether he thinks he will be successful or not. We have to do what needs to be done, and leave the rest to Hashem. It may take some stretching on our part, extending ourselves beyond what we feel capable of, but when we do that, we become deserving of Hashem lifting us to our goal.

A young man once came to the Chofetz Chaim and told him how excited he was to have recently purchased a pair of exceptional Tefillen. The parshiyos (parchments) were written by a well-respected Sofer, the leather battim (boxes) were made by a superb craftsman and every stringency was followed in their preparation.

"And how much did you pay for these Tefillen?" asked the Chofetz Chaim. "Eighteen rubles," replied the fellow, which was a huge sum at the time.

"And were you equally diligent to make sure the eighteen rubles was as perfect as the Tefillen? How was the money earned? If money is borrowed and not paid back promptly it is wrongful possession of another's property! It is certainly praiseworthy to have perfect Tefillen," concluded the sage, "but they must be bought with money that is just as perfect." ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DONIEL T. TRENK

What Kind of Tzadik?

After the Mabul, we read about the chet Cham committed against Noach, his father, at a time when Noach was inebriated with wine. There are many opinions about the specific nature of Cham's chet. But even considering it was a terrible sin, how could any father so severely curse his son, and grandson Canaan, and doom him, along with all his descendants, to an eternity of suffering, sealing their fate as slaves for all time?

What makes this tremendous klala even more incomprehensible, is that it came from the mouth of Noach, the "Ish Tzadik Tamim". Wouldn't a true tzaddik forgive an offense committed against him, especially one committed by his own son?

The Ish Chamudos provides a fascinating insight.

This story serves to highlight a critical

difference between the approach of Noach on the one hand, and that of the Avos on the other, when it came to their relationships towards their wayward sons.

Where Noach curses, Yitzchok blesses. Where Noach sees evil, Avraham searches for the good.

We find that even after Sara informed him of Yishmael's troublesome behavior, Avraham still cherished his relationship with Yishmael. Avraham sent Yishmael away with a broken heart, and never gave up on him.

Likewise, Yitzchok loved Esav, despite Esav being renowned as a merciless hunter. Instead of cursing Esav, Yitzchok did the opposite. He desired to give Esav the greatest of brachos.

The Torah way is to seek the good, even in places of darkness.

Chazal tell us that just as a person blesses HKB"H for the good, a person is obligated to bless Hashem for the bad (M. Brachot 9:5). This is why we say "Baruch Dayan Ha'Emes" upon hearing of a person's passing. This mentality is an essential part of living as a Torah Jew.

The Medrash notes that Noach was a tzaddik in "his generation" only; however, if he lived during the time of Avraham, he would've been a nobody – "Lo Nechshav L'Klum". Why would he have been considered as "nothing". This perhaps is meant to convey that Noach lacked a critical aspect of what it means to be a true Eved Hashem. He couldn't see past the bad. Looking at Cham, all Noach could see was a wicked son, and this is how he likely viewed the resham of his generation. This may be why he didn't daven for them.

The nekuda of blessing the "bad", being "Mevarech al Ha'Raah", is unique to Am Yisroel and is the foundation of the Torah path. This is what the Avos labored to achieve in their relationships with their most difficult children. We can only daven that this is how the Borei Olam acts towards us all, "K'Rachem Av al Ha'Banim". © 2022 Rabbi D. Trenk

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

There are things in life that seem so simple and so secondary that we barely pay attention to them. That is, until life teaches us otherwise.

Imagine talking to someone about making money, which you really need to do, and after 45 minutes of casual discussion he happens to throw in at the end, "And last week I made a million dollars." Would it catch your attention? Would you make one of those faces that say, "Wait, what?"

It certainly caught my attention. Decades ago, when I still worked in the business world, I was out for a dinner with a client of my father's, who happened to be a very successful and wealthy businessman. He was casually telling us his financial history when he

happened to mention that he made a million dollars that day in the stock market. He had a significant amount of stock that he sold, and it netted him a million dollars. Wait, what?

The Torah kind of did that last week to us. It began with its recounting of Creation, quickly moved to man's abuse of it, and ended with God's decision to reboot it. And as we sat back and pondered how so much good could become so bad so quickly, the Torah threw in, "And Noach found grace in the eyes of God." Period.

Wait, what? What does that have to do with anything? Granted it tells us why Noach survived the judgment of mankind, but it doesn't tell us how. It's like a CEO telling his entire staff that he is letting them go except for one person who happens to not be at the meeting. When asked by the rest of the staff what makes that person so special, the boss just says, "I just like him."

That's when everyone looked at each other with quizzical faces that said, "Him?" He was the least driven to advance in the office. He wasn't the most exciting guy to be around, and few people paid much attention to him. But apparently the boss did. They had previously thought that they had something going for them that he didn't. All of a sudden, just the opposite seemed to be true, and as they filed out the boss's door one last time, they wished they had taken note of it earlier.

Noach had been a reject from his society. Whatever he had no one else wanted, and what they had Noach seemed to do without. He just wasn't on the same page as the world around him, and this made him an outcast. Dovid HaMelech wouldn't write these words for over 1,000 years, but they already applied to Noach: The stone the builders despised became the cornerstone (Tehillim 118:23).

Until that is that God fired mankind, save for Noach and his family. And as the rest of mankind filed out the boss's door forever with pink slips in hand, they wondered what it was that Noach had, that caught their boss's attention. The Torah answers that question: chayn.

He had it.

They hadn't.

Oh right, chayn. What's chayn?

Chayn is one of those things that is hard to define but easy to detect. Children automatically have chayn. Some of the nicest people have chayn. Some of the most important, attractive, famous people, do not have chayn. It can show up where you least expect it, and not show up where you think it should be.

There is a clue. It doesn't stand out at first because it seems to have little to do with chayn, just the name of Noach. But the name Noach is not the mirror image of chayn for no reason, and it certainly isn't a coincidence. Yosef may be the main representative of

chayn, but Noach was its founder, so to speak.

The Torah says: Lamech lived for 182 years, and he fathered a son. And he named him Noach, saying, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands from the ground, which God has cursed." (Bereishis 5:28-29)

This one will give us rest: He will give us rest from the toil of our hands. Before Noach came, they did not have plowshares, and he prepared [these tools] for them. And the land was producing thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat, because of the curse of the first man, but in Noach's time, it [the curse] subsided. (Rashi)

The name Noach is connected to chayn, but the name Noach itself alludes to how he made life easier for other people. This would seem to say that chayn is very much connected to how much we put others before ourselves. Somehow, God really likes this, perhaps even more than what we do just for Him.

This would explain why we begin Yom Kippur with Tefillas Zachah. That's the prayer during which we forgive others for any wrongdoing against us, and they, us. Because, as we are told, God only forgives us for sins between us and others if we have already been forgiven by them. Since we can't always recall who we offended during a previous year, or get to them in time, we say this tefillah to cover ourselves, either as forgivers or as the forgiven.

My halachah rebi once taught us, "Your ruchnios is someone else's gashmios." He meant that we personally have to be more concerned about our level of spirituality, and that it should be our priority. But our spirituality, i.e. mitzvah, was to make sure that others had what they needed materially.

This is often not the case, because people often focus on what others lack spiritually. In other words, what they are doing wrong...where they are sinning, especially if it is in an area that they do not sin. And even though there is a Torah mitzvah to criticize others if you can do it as per the mitzvah, something the Gemora questions even in its time, this prerogative says that it has to be in a way that is noach for the person. Your criticism should inspire people to change for the better, not for the worse.

On a personal note, this idea helped me with something I used to struggle with a lot: comforter covers. They are those big clumsy slip covers you put over a comforter on a bed that usually matches the sheets. They're a nice touch but a pain in the neck, sometimes literally. My wife insists on them for our guests, but then again, she doesn't put them on.

The problem is that it takes a lot of time and energy for me to get the comforter inside to cooperate. I think it was easier for God to send the Jewish people to the four corners of the earth than it is for me to get the comforter to the four corners of their cover. I know there are techniques, and I have some of my own.

Sometimes I actually go inside it and stretch the comforter out, but I almost didn't get back out once, so...

But as the Gemora says, Hachnasas Orachim - bringing guests into our homes is like greeting the Shechinah. I still struggle to put them on (if only they went on as easily as they come off), but it got a little easier psychologically when, on a couple occasions, our guests commented how much they appreciated that we made the room look so hotelish. It made them feel special to see the beds made so caringly. I no longer fight against it, reminding myself that the reward for a mitzvah increases as the difficulty does as well. Maybe it will even save me from the next flood, or whatever...

It was enough to save his life, but not enough to save him the trouble of taking care of the animal world for a year. Noach had enough chayn to survive the Flood, but not enough chayn to not be tasked with the building an ark for 120 years, or being a zookeeper, a very taxing job.

Chazal say this was because he did not try hard enough to bring the people back to God. If they came by the ark construction site and asked what on earth he was doing, he would warn them about the upcoming flood. But unlike Avraham Avinu in the future, he did not actively try to mekarev -- bring close -- the people to God, to get them to do teshuvah while they still could.

For good reason. He could see who he had to deal with. Would anyone have listened to him had he pulled an Avraham Avinu? According to the Gemora, that is not the question to ask: [At the time of the destruction of the First Temple,] The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Gavriel, "Go and put an ink [letter] Tav upon the foreheads of the righteous so that the damaging angel cannot harm them, and a blood [letter] Tav on the foreheads of the evil, so that the damaging angel can overpower them."

The Trait of Judgment said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe, What difference is there between the two?" He told it, "These were completely righteous, and these were completely evil." It said before Him, "Master of the Universe, they (the righteous) could have protested, but didn't!" He answered, "It is revealed and known before Me that had they protested, they would not have been listened to!"

It answered, "To You it was revealed...but who revealed it to them?!" (Shabbos 55a)

The Gemora concludes that God agreed with the Middas HaDin, and destroyed everyone, tzaddikim included. If you care enough, you try. You never know what will happen as a result. Personally, I have seen people whom I thought would never be relevant to a Torah way of life, do teshuvah. And if you help one person even a little, it isn't worth it?

That's for God to decide, but for us to try.
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