

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

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 God, and the land was filled with violence. God 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 God summons Abraham to begin an entirely new chapter in the religious story of humankind. There is no Flood -- God 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,

God 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 Shuruppak, 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 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 God's wish that humans should respect the integrity of each nation and each individual. When at the end of the Babel story God "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 God 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 Noah 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. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l © 2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**N**oah was a righteous man, whole-hearted in his generations; Noah walked with God. “(Genesis 6:9) Was Noah truly righteous? And what does true righteousness entail? At first blush, this shouldn't even be a question. Surely, the opening verse of the portion suggests that it's an open and shut case. After all, does any other figure in the Torah receive three adulatory statements in one verse, or even come close to such seemingly boundless praise? Not even Moses is called a tzadik (righteous man).

Before the testimonials for Noah are approved and sealed, Rashi reminds us that although certain Sages look upon Noah favorably, others were meager with their praise. The text states, 'righteous...wholehearted in his generations.' The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) suggests that there are two ways to interpret this qualifying phrase: on the one hand, if he is so worthy of praise in a generation so completely evil, how much more praiseworthy would he have been in the generation of Abraham when he would have had righteous company. On the other hand, perhaps the qualifying phrase suggests that Noah is only praiseworthy in comparison with his generation of scoundrels. Had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not even be worthy of mention.

But the question remains: Why even suggest the possibility that Noah is second-rate when the plain meaning of the text is so adulatory? Let us compare and contrast Noah and Abraham in similar circumstances. When Abraham is told that the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed, he argues with

the Almighty as though he were bargaining in the marketplace of Jerusalem's Mahane Yehudah:

Will the Almighty destroy the righteous with the wicked, will not the Judge of the entire earth do justice? If there are fifty righteous men, forty righteous men...even ten righteous men, will the cities not be saved? (Gen. 18:24–33)

In stark contrast, when Noah is informed of the impending destruction of the world, he obediently goes about constructing a private ark to rescue himself, his family, and a requisite number of earthly creatures. While Abraham emerges as the missionary who breaks walls as well as idols, as one who opens doors to his tent in every direction to welcome and influence as many people as possible, Noah would rather cut himself off from all adverse influences in order to erect an enclosure to protect his high-level communication with his God.

Whether one identifies with the Abraham camp or the Noah camp reflects one's outlook on Judaism and its relationship to the modern world. Hassidism, which began as a distinctive Jewish outreach movement, usually sided with Abraham in its biblical interpretations. Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoy, the famous disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov in the eighteenth century, writes in his *Toledot Yakov Yosef* that when the Torah describes Noah as 'walking with God,' it is a pejorative description. Noah walked only and exclusively with God, tragically neglecting the wayward individuals all around him. Noah missed the opportunity of bringing God to humanity.

On the other hand, the Ketav Sofer, probably reacting to the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) and the Reform movement which threatened the Orthodox community during his lifetime (Pressburg, Hungary, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), utilizes his biblical commentary to justify turning inwards. He argues that Noah was absolutely correct in maintaining the wall between himself and the world. After all, Noah had good reason to fear that if he went outside to battle the prevailing winds, his own children might be tossed to the edges – and even cast beyond the pale – by their strong impact. The risk just wasn't worth it.

Interestingly, the Ketav Sofer was projecting the view of his father, the Hatam Sofer (1762–1839), one of the major leaders of Ashkenazi Jewry who vehemently fought against the breaches into traditional Judaism during his lifetime. He insisted that *hadash* [anything new – a play on the biblical-halakhic term for wheat harvested before the sixteenth day of Nissan] is forbidden by the Torah. The Ketav Sofer argued that the behavior of the prophet Samuel's wayward children [I Sam. 7:15–8:3] was a direct consequence of the fact that their father preached all over Israel and returned home for only one visit each year (*tekufat ha-shana*). If you go out to save the world, you might lose your own children!

Clearly, there is no singular view in the biblical and rabbinic sources. However, it is the outgoing Abraham, and not the in-reaching Noah, who is declared

the first Jew. We are unequivocally commanded to teach our fellow co-religionists who are straying from the path [Lev. 19:17]. Maimonides goes so far as to define the commandment to love God as directing us to ensure that God is beloved and known throughout the world, and insists that God instructed Moses to teach Israel the 613 commandments and the rest of the world the seven laws of morality [Laws of Kings 8:10]. Further, our prophets instruct us to be a 'light unto the nations,' the Torah defines our mission as a kingdom of priest-teachers, and the Aleinu prayer sets forth the vision of perfecting the world under the kingdom of ethical monotheism.

Faced with the contemporary challenges of assimilation and alienation of many Jews from traditional Judaism, can one mediate a balanced position between the Abrahams and the Noahs, between the advocates of in-reach and practitioners of out-reach?

I believe that the correct balance is suggested by Rabbi Yitzhak Arama in his commentary *Akedat Yitzhak*, in his remarks on the mishna in the Ethics of our Fathers:

Raban Shimon ben Gamliel says: 'The world endures on three things: justice, truth and peace....' (Avot 1:18)

Justice, he explains, is the relationship between the Jew and his society, our obligation to the world at large. Peace, on the other hand, is *shalom bayit*, the relationship between the Jew and his home, our obligation to family. And truth is the balanced combination of both.

As a source for his interpretation, R. Arama turns to the lesson taught by Jethro, the Midianite priest, to Moses, his son-in-law. Jethro is considered an important biblical hero because the advice he gave Moses radically reformed the entire judicial structure in the desert. (Consequently, the biblical portion containing the Decalogue bears his name.) And Moses listened to Jethro:

And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. (Ex. 18:25)

But is this all that Jethro taught Moses? If we look at the opening of the encounter between Jethro and Moses, we find another, more subtle, layer of purpose behind Jethro's confrontation:

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Tziporah, Moses' wife, after he [Moses] had sent her away, and her two sons...And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with [Moses] sons and with his wife unto Moses...and he said unto Moses, 'I thy father-in-law Jethro am coming unto you, and here are your wife, and her two sons with her...' (Ex. 18:1–6)

The repetition of the word *hoten* (father-in-law), and the continuous mentioning of Moses' wife and his two sons, are there for a purpose. When he went on his mission to Pharaoh, Moses had apparently left his family

behind. In effect, Moses gave up his family in order to minister to the Jewish nation. And, according to Akedat Yitzhak, Jethro is teaching Moses that he has acted incorrectly; he must first discharge his obligation to his family, and only then does he have the right to dedicate himself to his nation and the problems of the society at large.

This idea may very well be the key to balancing the tension between Noah's tight ship and Abraham's open tent. The first responsibility a person must have is to his own family. But he cannot rest on his laurels, on his own Garden of Eden in the suburbs of New York (or Jerusalem for that matter). The time must arrive in every Jew's life when he must turn the closed ship into an open tent, the Noahide perspective into an Abrahamic ideal. And when one attempts to do both simultaneously, it is crucially important that one's own family does not get left behind. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

After the destruction of civilization in the great flood a new generation arose and searched for a way to immortalize itself – so that their existence would withstand any new natural disasters. They gathered in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and there built the great city that would be called Nineveh. And to guarantee that their achievements would be forever remembered, they embarked on building a colossal structure – a great tower pointing towards - and seemingly even touching - the sky.

It was the first ancestor of our modern-day skyscrapers. This was the great technological leap forward in the discovery of creating bricks as a building material, which enabled such a project to be imagined and executed. The Torah specifically relates to us that the sole purpose of this tower soaring heavenward was “to build for us a name” – a remembrance, an eternal monument to human technology and ability that later generations would gaze upon in awe and admiration.

It was a testament to the human ego and its accompanying hubris. That is perhaps what Midrash is implying when it states that, “.....we will prop up the heavens” with this tower. They were saying that puny man could successfully defy God and nature and immortalize itself with its technological wonders and its insatiable ambitions.

Every dictator in history has sought to immortalize his achievements in stone and marble lest his greatness becomes unknown to future generations. Almost all of these memorials have failed

to live up to their original purpose. The slaves who built the pyramids of Egypt are more well-known than are their pharoanic masters.

The Parthenon and Coliseum lie in ruins and Nineveh itself has long since disappeared from the map of the world. And the great twin towers of the World Trade Center of New York City are also no longer with us.

The irony of all of this is that none of the great architectural monuments of the ancient, medieval and modern world were felled by nature. There was no need to prop up the heavens in order to save Nineveh from destruction. Nineveh and all of the other great monuments of the ancient world were all destroyed by human beings who were themselves bent upon creating their own eternal monuments to their own achievements.

It is part of the inborn competitive nature of human beings to attempt to destroy the immortality of others as a means of guaranteeing one's own immortality. Thus we continue to hound people who are already in the grave, searching for scandal and blame. The Torah itself tells us that the tower at Nineveh was never completed because people did not understand each other's language – basically, they could no longer cooperate one with the other.

The fractiousness and parochialism of humans towards each other is what truly stands in the way of human immortality. Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant summed up this lesson in his pithy remark: “Concern for the needs of others in this world is my entry ticket to the World to Come.” Torah values and its observance coupled with good deeds, not physical monuments, are our guarantors in achieving immortality. © 2023 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 and his son Canaan appear to mock their father and grandfather. In contrast, Shem and Yefet remain silent and modestly take a garment to cover their father's nakedness (9:22, 23). Here, the acts of Noah's children teach us a great deal, 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. Rather than allowing doubt to destroy our belief in God, we should, if we can, isolate

our uncertainty and consider the larger picture. We may feel that God has hurt us in certain ways, but when we step back, we are able to 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. Rather than focus on the point of disagreement, we have it within ourselves to take into account that person's larger goodness, realize that every one of us has certain flaws, and move on with the friendship.

So too in Noah's 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 is to allow this mistake to destroy their entire relationship with Noah. And so, they uncover his nakedness – they mock him.

But not so with Shem and Yefet. No doubt their father has become drunk. But they do not focus exclusively on that failure. They take into account their father's whole personality and his heroic efforts in saving his family and the remnants of the world during the deluge. Hence, they cover up his nakedness, symbolizing their readiness to separate out the wrong even as they continue to love and respect their father.

Since we are not perfect, we cannot expect perfection from others. No relationship can exist without some disappointment. As we tolerate our failings, so too should we learn to tolerate the failings of others.

Shem and Yefet teach that in a genuine and deep relationship, one can acknowledge disappointment while at the same time not allowing a shortcoming, even a significant one, to sweepingly destroy the bonds of friendship, commitment, and love. ©2023 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

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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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**T**wo by two they came to Noach, to the Ark; male and female, as G-d commanded Noach." (*Beraishis* 7:9) Gathering two of every species of animal was a tall order, yet that was Noach's mission in order to save the creatures of earth and perpetuate their species after the flood. This posuk tells us that Noach's job was made easier in that the animals came to him on their own, already paired up with their mates. Only the seven pure animals, which were not for the continuation of the species, but for Noach's own purposes later on, did He have to trouble himself to collect.

If you look back to the original command, Noach was told to bring two of each animal into the ark, but it doesn't say that he had to gather them. Noach was commanded to build the ark and to gather the food for all the different animals. This is precisely what he did. However, he did not go around looking for each animal and rounding them up.

Instead, on the day of the flood, Noach was

prepared with the “escape vehicle,” and it was stocked with food, and then the animals arrived and he escorted them onto the ark. As there was no physical way it could accommodate them, it was a miraculous process, but the ark was made very large so as to minimize the effect of the miracle.

Had Noach built the ark, and stocked it with food, but no animals showed up, it would have been rather anticlimactic. All his efforts would have been in vain. Why didn't Noach go out and begin rounding up animals as the designated day drew closer?

The answer is an important lesson in fulfilling our missions in the world. Some things are in our power, and some things are not. We don't determine whether we will do what we're supposed to based on whether we think others (including Hashem) will do their part. Rather, we do what we need to do, and leave everything else to Hashem.

Noach understood that he could not possibly gather every animal in the world. It would have to be a miracle. Therefore, there was no reason for him to do part of it to “help” Hashem. Instead, when the time came to load the animals onto the ark, he would do so, and he would have everything that WAS in his power ready for that day.

Each of us is given a mission. We may sometimes feel incapable of completing it because others fall short, but that isn't our concern. If we do everything that we can do, and leave the rest to Hashem, then we have completed our missions, even if the desired “end result” doesn't seem to have materialized. That isn't our problem. We must realize that Hashem can make any outcome He wants come to fruition; He is just giving us the opportunity to be part of the solution.

The musician ties his bow tie, puts on his tuxedo jacket, and then looks in the mirror to make sure everything is in place. Satisfied, he drives to the theater and takes his seat in the orchestra. His eyes glued to the conductor, he turns pages of music throughout the performance, while he plays nary a note. He sits and he waits.

One hour passes, then another. Finally, the last moments of the concert are upon them. Reaching into his case he lifts up his instrument. Excited and alert, he watches as the conductor approaches the final notes of the performance. At the last moment, he rises and claps together his cymbals a single time for the finale. The audience applauds. The musician smiles to himself, satisfied that he has played his part; smaller than the others' perhaps, but no less important. ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Three Sons

Near the end of Parashat Bereishit, we are told of the birth of Noach's three sons, Shem, Cham, and Yaphet. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that

in the listings of the generations following Adam and until the birth of Noach, each generation only listed the name of the firstborn son, followed by the words “and he begat sons and daughters.” Only when the Torah comes to Noach do we find that the names of all three sons are mentioned. Since these three sons were to be the future of the world, it is important that we know as much about them as is possible.

Our Rabbis indicate that names are very important and may become indicative of a child's character. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch deals with the names that were given to Noach's sons. The name, Shem, means “name,” and also, then, is the “conception of objects.” In Parashat Bereishit, we are told that Hashem brought each of the animals before Adam so that Adam could name them. This task involved conceptualizing each animal to understand what is the nature of each beast. Thus, the name given was to match Adam's conceptualization of each animal brought before him. “The whole wisdom of men consisted originally, and in truth still consists today, in the ability to give things names.”

The second son, Cham, means “heat.” The name indicated “the excited action of our senses.” Cham's name was an indication of this son's excited, sensual character. The third son mentioned was Yaphet, from the word “yapha, beauty.” Hirsch points out that the name also comes from the word “patach, open,” open to all external impressions, even to be overwhelmed by them. Yaphet was sensitive to beauty, was “open to all external impressions,” and was overwhelmed by them. Thus, Shem was “the conception of the spiritual, mental; Cham, “the glowing, excited, of the highest degree of sensuality,” and Yaphet, “the feeling, the imagination which is sensitive to beauty.”

Hirsch explains that all three brothers comprised the combined aspects of a healthy life when guided by a “higher principle,” namely, Hashem and His Law. With Hashem's guidance, each of the brothers could have been able to reach a high level of human existence. “Separated, Shem would be the thinking one, Cham, the sensuous one, and Yaphet, instead of being guided by the ideal of beauty, to come to the ideal of goodness and become a Tzadik, a righteous one.” The extent to which each brother could reach this ideal was dependent on each brother's willingness to be guided by Hashem.

Rashi explains that each brother worked tirelessly on the Ark to feed and groom the animals. Our Rabbis explain that this was an exceptionally difficult task, as some animals ate at night, some in the day, some on the second hour, and some during the third. This necessitated working the full day and night. It is not clear if the brothers took turns or if they slept at all. Noach had raised each of his sons to be righteous and to fulfill the needs of others. This level of righteousness and service to Hashem was enough to qualify them for being saved on the Ark.

The separation of the three brothers' character and actions occurs already on the Ark. When the three brothers entered the Ark, we are told that the only people who entered the Ark were Noach, his wife, Shem, Cham, and Yaphet, and their wives. When they exited the Ark, the Torah tells us, "And the sons of Noach that went out of the Ark were Shem, Cham, and Yaphet, and Cham was the father of Canaan." Our Rabbis criticize Cham, as it appears that he must have had marital relations with his wife on the Ark. This was vilified because the Torah forbids marital relations during a time of great danger. Even though the most dangerous time for those on the Ark was the first two months of the Flood, the entire journey on the boat was perilous. Cham was enticed by his sensuous nature, and this "sin" began his downfall.

The descendants of Cham became increasingly more corrupt. His son, Canaan uncovered his grandfather while he slept after imbibing too much wine. Canaan told his father, Cham, who went inside Noach's tent to see. Shem and Yaphet remained outside the tent and only entered facing backwards to cover their father. After seeing what had happened, Noach cursed Canaan, which in effect cursed Cham: "Canaan will be accursed. A servant of servants shall he be unto his brothers. And he said, Blessed is Hashem, the Hashem of Shem; and Canaan shall be a slave to them." This was the second descent for Cham and an indication that his offspring would descend even further. Canaan and his descendants were so corrupt that Hashem allowed the Land to spit them out before the B'nei Yisrael were to enter. Egypt, another son of Cham founded a nation which rejected Hashem, worshipped many false gods, and relied on magic and sorcery. These two nations surrounded the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. Another son of Cham was Kush who was the father of the evil Nimrod.

After the incident in his tent, Noach blessed both Yaphet and Shem: "May Elokim extend Yaphet, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be a slave to them." Noach hoped that Yaphet would attach himself to the tents (study halls) of Shem. But Yaphet was enticed by beauty which was heightened in future generations. Yaphet fathered several children including Gomer and Yavan. Yavan is the ancestor of Greece, a culture that praised the beauty of the human body and forbid the "desecration" of that body with circumcision. When the Greeks conquered Israel, circumcision was eventually forbidden, and some Jews, who were Hellenists, went to great extents to remove the signs of their own circumcision.

Shem, who was governed by intellect and spiritual righteousness, was blessed to be the forefather of the Jewish People. Shem is the Shemite or Semite from whom Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov descended. Rashi explains that Shem was really the third son and not the oldest (Yaphet). The reason why his name was always mentioned first is that the Torah wished to praise

his intellect and his righteousness.

These three traits of Noach's sons, who became the founders of the New World, could be used for good or evil. As Hirsch stressed earlier, they each could become positive traits by joining together in service to Hashem and His Torah. We each have traits which may seem negative but are positive when directed to Hashem. May we guide our own negative traits into serving Hashem and changing them into positive ones.

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RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom

With the specter of a presidential contest between the same candidates as in 2020 now slowly becoming visible on the horizon, both Republicans and Democrats are holding their breaths. To be honest, I never thought it would happen.

It's simply astonishing that candidates whom the majority of citizens would prefer not to see in office (65% do not want Biden elected again and 60% said the same of Trump) are once again vying for the highest office in the land (not to mention perhaps the most powerful job in the free world). This means that most of the country is just going to vote for the person they think will do the least amount of harm. It's just crazy.

Fascinatingly, I finally realized the one point on which both Democrats and Republicans agree -- that this will be an apocalyptic election; each one believes that the world will come to an end if the other party wins the presidency.

Anyone familiar with last week's Torah reading knows that at one point the earth was **ACTUALLY** threatened with destruction. It tells the story of a time when mankind had utterly corrupted itself and became morally bankrupt: "God saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing. Every impulse of his innermost thought was only for evil, all day long. God regretted that He had made man [...] God said; 'I will obliterate humanity that I have created from the face of the earth'" (Genesis 6:5-7).

This week's Torah portion is called Noah -- named after the man the Almighty charged with saving a sliver of mankind and the creatures that inhabited the earth. Noah was a righteous man; in fact, he is the only person in the entire Torah to be called a tzaddik -- a righteous person (Genesis 6:9). Noah is not considered the first Jew -- that title belongs to Abraham. Thus, quite remarkably, the only person in the entire Torah to be called a tzaddik was a non-Jew!

"God said to Noah; 'The end of all flesh has come before me, the world is filled with man's crimes. I will therefore destroy them from the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood [...]' (Genesis 6:13-14).

The Almighty gives Noah very specific instructions on how to construct the ark. I am going to presume that -- outside of seeing a cartoon drawing of

the ark -- most readers have no idea what the ark actually looked like. By contrast, most people have seen pictures of and are familiar with the ill-fated Titanic. So, I have prepared a chart comparing the two.

Now a couple of numbers probably jump out at you, but the most puzzling is why it took Noah 120 years to build the ark. Naturally, it reminds me of the following joke:

God appears to Noah and asks him to build an ark to save a few good humans and two from every living species. He also gave Noah the blueprints, saying, "You have 6 months to build the ark before I will start the unending rain for 40 days and 40 nights."

Six months later, the Lord looks down and sees Noah weeping in his yard -- but no ark.

"Noah!" He roars, "I'm about to start the rain! Where is the ark?" "Forgive me, Lord," begs Noah, "but things have changed."

"First, I needed a building permit. That's been held up because I've been arguing for months with the fire inspector about the need for a sprinkler system. Then my HOA claimed that I've violated the neighborhood zoning laws by building the ark in my yard and that it exceeds the height limitations. We had to go before the city's planning and zoning board to ask for a variance. Of course, they wanted to know how I was going to get this huge boat into the ocean. I tried to explain that the sea would be coming to us, but they just thought I was crazy.

"Getting the wood was another huge problem. In order to save the spotted owl, there's an EPA ban on cutting local trees. I tried to convince the environmentalists that I needed the wood to save the owls -- but of course that went nowhere! Oh, by the way, the EPA is also demanding an environmental impact study on your proposed flood.

"When I started gathering the animals, the animal rights groups sued me. They asked for licensing for keeping exotic animals and then insisted that I was confining wild animals against their will. They demanded to see where they were going to be housed and then argued that the accommodations were too restrictive, and it was cruel and inhumane to put so many animals in such a confined space.

"I'm also still trying to resolve a complaint with the Human Rights Commission on how many minorities I'm supposed to hire for my building crew and the trades unions say I can't use my sons. They insisted I have to only hire union workers with ark-building experience.

"So, forgive me, Lord, but it would take at least 100 years for me to finish this Ark." Suddenly the skies clear, the sun begins to shine, and a rainbow stretches across the sky. Noah looks up in wonder and asks, "You mean you're not going to destroy the world?"

"No," says the Lord. "The government clearly beat me to it." Jokes aside, according to our sages, Noah purposefully took 120 years to build the ark so that people would ask him what it's all about and hopefully

after hearing his explanation they would take the opportunity to repent and mend their ways.

Here is another fact you may not have known: Not all the species that Noah collected into the ark were limited to two (one male and one female). Noah brought additional kosher animals.

"From the pure animals take for yourself seven by seven, a male and its mate" (Genesis 7:2).

Why would God ask Noah to take more of the kosher animals? Mankind had not yet been given permission to eat the animals -- that only came after Noah and his family left the ark (Genesis 9:1-3).

The answer is that upon leaving the ark the Almighty wanted Noah to have the opportunity to bring sacrifices and the only animals permitted to be sacrificed were the kosher ones.

But this is still troublesome. As the great medieval commentator Rashi points out, the ark was a pretty miserable place to be: It was crowded, noisy, smelly, and mostly dark. Compounding those issues was the fact that some animals eat during the day and some at night, so Noah and his very limited staff were on call 24 hours a day. Rashi points out that Noah was actually coughing up blood from the stress of it all (Noah even prayed to God that the time on the ark be shortened, but was turned down -- see Rashi's commentary on 7:23).

So why did the Almighty ask Noah to exacerbate the issue by bringing in even more animals than were necessary to the ark? Noah lived for three hundred years after the end of the flood; he could have simply waited a few decades until the different species of kosher animals became re-established, grew into large flocks and herds, and then easily brought sacrifices. Why the urgent need to pack them into the ark at this time and make a difficult situation more unbearable?

The Almighty was conveying a very important message to the survivors of the flood. Even though Hashem had been bitterly disappointed by the state of humanity and their immorality to the point that He decided that they had forfeited their right to live, He still desired a relationship with mankind.

It was critical for those entering the ark to know that Hashem desired a relationship with them. Every relationship is built on communication and one of the first ways of communicating with the Almighty was worshipping Him with sacrifices. In fact, the prayers that the Jewish people offer every day of the week in synagogues all over the world were instituted in place of the sacrifices that were brought in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, beginning about three thousand years ago.

The means of communicating with the Almighty were the kosher animals that were to be brought as sacrifices upon exiting the ark. By assuring those entering the ark that the Almighty wanted to continue to maintain a relationship, it enabled them to not feel abandoned or alone. Furthermore, when they exited the ark, they were immediately able to reconnect with God.

That is why it was critical to bring many more kosher animals onto the ark, even if it meant more work and discomfort.

This also has a lasting message for all of mankind: No matter how far you feel you may have strayed, God is patiently waiting for you and He desires that you once again begin a conversation with Him. What could be more empowering than that? ©2023 Rabbi Y. Zweig and shabbatshalom.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

R' Gamliel HaKohen Rabinowitz-Rappaport shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'ar Ha'shamayim in Yerushalayim) writes: The obvious connection between this week's Parashah and Haftarah is the verse in the latter (Yeshayah 54:9), "For like the waters of Noach shall this be to Me. As I have sworn never again to pass the waters of Noach over the earth, so have I sworn not to be wrathful with you or rebuke you." On a deeper level, R' Rabinowitz notes that this week's Haftarah is also read during the Seven Weeks of Consolation following Tisha B'Av -- half of it (Yeshayah 54:1-10) for Parashat Re'eh and half (54:11-55:5) for Ki Tetze. Just as these verses console us after we recall the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, so they console us after we recall the destruction of the entire world in the Flood.

There is a practical lesson in this, writes R' Rabinowitz. If a person undergoes a tragedy or some suffering, he must not remain in a state of mourning. He must seek and accept consolation. Another lesson is that after parents or teachers punish a child or student as appropriate, they must offer the student words of consolation and encouragement as well. It is noteworthy, R' Rabinowitz adds, that Hashem taught the prophet Yeshayah these words of consolation over the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash 110 years or more before that destruction occurred. This teaches us how important it is to Hashem that we console those who have experienced suffering. (Tiv Ha'haftarot)

"Noach was a Tzaddik / righteous man..." (6:9) What is the defining characteristic of a righteous man? R' Yosef Kahaneman z"l (1886-1969; the Ponovezher Rav) would regularly say: A Tzaddik is good-hearted, as illustrated in our Parashah, where Noach is described as a Tzaddik.



What do we know about Noach? That he selflessly cared for thousands of living things. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

R' Moshe Zuriel z"l (1938-2023; Mashgiach Ruchani

of Yeshivat Sha'alvim and a prolific author) writes: The Zohar Chadash comments on Noach's name, "He was Noach / calm in his thoughts, calm in his words, and calm in his ways. A person who behaves this way is worthy of being called a Tzaddik."

At the same time, R' Zuriel notes, the Zohar Chadash does not withhold its criticism of Noach: Come and see the difference between the Tzaddikim of Yisrael and Noach. Noach did not protect his generation and did not pray for his contemporaries as Avraham did. When Hashem told Avraham (Bereishit 18:20), "The outcry of S'dom and Amorah has become great," immediately (18:23), "Avraham came forward and said, 'Will You also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked?'" [Until here from the Zohar Chadash.] The fundamental difference between Noach and Avraham, R' Zuriel writes, was that the former worried only about himself, while the latter worried about everyone--even about wicked people.

What led Avraham to behave this way? R' Zuriel explains: Through his own intellect, he arrived at the lesson that R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) would later teach us: "One who loves Hashem loves His creations." If Hashem saw fit to create those creations, who are we to think we know better?!

This does not mean, R' Zuriel adds, that a Tzaddik accepts the wicked as they are. To the contrary, one who loves another feels compelled to point out his mistakes and help him to improve, not because he feels superior, but because he knows all men share a common destiny. (Otzrot Ha'Torah: Noach #1)

"Make the Tevah / Ark Kinnim / compartments..." (6:14) R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev z"l (1740-1809; early Chassidic Rebbe) writes: The word "Kinnim" means a dwelling place, as in "Kan Tzipor" / a bird's nest. Besides meaning "Ark," the word "Tevah" can mean "word." Thus, this verse is hinting that your dwelling place should be "built" with "Tevot" / words of Torah study and prayer.

Alternatively, let your words cause Hashem to dwell in this world. (Kedushat Levi)

"You shall make a Tzohar for the Ark." (6:16) Rashi writes: Some say this was a window. Others say it was a precious stone that gave light to them.

R' Shlomo Pappenheim z"l (1740-1814; Dayan / rabbinical court judge in Breslau, Germany) explains: The word "Tzohar" comes from the root Tzadi-Reish, which connotes focusing or intensifying. For example, a woman's very intense labor pains are called "Tzirei Leidah." The period of intense mourning leading up to Tisha B'Av is called "Bein Ha'meitzarim." In our verse, the Tzohar was something--either a window or a gem--to focus and intensify the sun's light. This, too, is why midday is called "Tzaharayim." (Cheishek Shlomo) ©2023 S. Katz and torah.org