

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Noach brings to a close the eleven chapters that precede the call to Abraham and the beginning of the special relationship between him and his descendants, and God. During these eleven chapters, the Torah gives prominence to four stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the generation of the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. Each of these stories involves an interaction between God and humanity. Each represents another step in the maturation of humanity. If we trace the course of these stories, we can discover a connection that goes deeper than chronology, a developmental line in the narrative of the evolution of humanity.

The first story is about Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit. Once they have eaten, and discovered shame, God asks them what they have done: And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman You put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (3:11-13)

Faced with primal failure, the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. Both deny personal responsibility: it wasn't me; it wasn't my fault. This is the birth of what today is called the victim culture.

The second drama is about Cain and Abel. Both bring offerings. Abel's is accepted, Cain's is not -- why this is so is not relevant here. In his anger, Cain kills Abel. Again there is an exchange between a human being and God: Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground (49:9-10).

Once again the theme is responsibility, but in a different sense. Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, "It wasn't me." He

denies moral responsibility. "I am not my brother's keeper." I am not responsible for his safety. Yes, I did it because I felt like it. Cain has not yet learned the difference between "I can" and "I may."

The third is the story of Noah. Noah is introduced with great expectations: "He will comfort us" (5:29), says his father Lamech, giving him his name. This is the one to redeem man's failure, to offer comfort for "the earth which God cursed." Yet though Noah is a righteous man, he is not a hero. Noah does not save humanity. He saves only himself, his family and the animals he takes with him in the ark. The Zohar contrasts him unfavorably with Moses: Moses prayed for his generation, Noah did not. In the end, his failure to take responsibility for others diminishes him as well: in the last scene we see him drunk and exposed in his tent. In the words of the Midrash, "he profaned himself and became profaned." (Bereishit Rabbah 36:3) One cannot be a sole survivor and still survive. *Sauve-qui-peut* ("let everyone who can, save himself") is not a principle of Judaism. We have to do what we can to save others, not just ourselves. Noah failed the test of collective responsibility.

The fourth is the enigmatic story of the Tower of Babel. The sin of its builders is unclear, but is indicated by two key words in the text. The story is framed, beginning and end, with the phrase *kol ha'aretz*, "the whole earth" (11:1,8). In between, there is a series of similar sounding words: *sham* (there), *shem* (name), and *shamayim* (heaven). The story of Babel is a drama about the two key words of the first sentence of the Torah: "In the beginning God created heaven (*shamayim*) and earth (*aretz*)" (1:1). Heaven is the domain of God; earth is the domain of man. By attempting to build a tower that would "reach heaven," the builders of Babel were men trying to be like gods.

This story seems to have little to do with responsibility, and to be focusing on a different issue than do the first three. However, not accidentally does the word responsibility suggest response-ability. The Hebrew equivalent, *ahrayut*, comes from the word *aher*, meaning "an other." Responsibility is always a response to something or someone. In Judaism, it means response to the command of God. By attempting to reach heaven, the builders of Babel were in effect saying: we are going to take the place of God. We are not going to respond to His law or respect His boundaries, not going to accept His Otherness. We are

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
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going to create an environment where we rule, not Him, where the Other is replaced by Self. Babel is the failure of ontological responsibility -- the idea that something beyond us makes a call on us.

What we see in Genesis 1-11 is an exceptionally tightly constructed four-act drama on the theme of responsibility and moral development, presenting the maturation of humanity, as echoing the maturation of the individual. The first thing we learn as children is that our acts are under our control (personal responsibility). The next is that not everything we can do, we may do (moral responsibility). The next stage is the realisation that we have a duty not just to ourselves but to those on whom we have an influence (collective responsibility). Ultimately we learn that morality is not a mere human convention, but is written into the structure of existence. There is an Author of being, therefore there is an Authority beyond mankind to whom, when acting morally, we respond (ontological responsibility).

This is developmental psychology as we have come to know it through the work of Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg and Abraham Maslow. The subtlety and depth of the Torah is remarkable. It was the first, and is still the greatest, text on the human condition and our psychological growth from instinct to conscience, from "dust of the earth" to the morally responsible agent the Torah calls "the image of God." *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Noah 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-??}

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 secular, non-religious 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 into the prevailing winds and currents, 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, one of the major leaders of Ashkenazi Jewry who vehemently fought against the breaches into traditional Judaism during his lifetime. He insisted that hadash is forbidden by the Torah. The Ketav Sofer argued that the behavior of the prophet Samuel's wayward children 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 progeny!

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. 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. 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 Noachs, 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 (1,18):

Raban Shimon ben Gamliel says: 'the world endures on three things: justice, truth and peace....' (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. I would add the beautiful Mishnah in the beginning of the Ethics of our Fathers which came before the Mishnah just cited: "Be Among the disciples of Aaron, the High Priest: Love peace, pursue peace, love all of humanity (including Gentiles) and bring them close to Torah". ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions

& Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The opening sections of the Torah with which we are currently engaged in studying, deal with one of the central problems of human existence and that is the ability to cope with tragedy, disappointment and frustration. The adjustment of human beings to being driven out of the Garden of Eden is really the entire story of human civilization and of its very bleak moments.

This week we read of the difficulty of Noah and his descendants to cope with the tragedy that they witnessed when the great flood destroyed the Mesopotamian human civilization. There were different reactions to what they had witnessed and experienced. Noah himself forsook much of his spiritual greatness and accomplishment to become a person of the earth, traumatized by the experiences of the past.

The English expression for this type of attitude is that one attempts to drown his sorrows away. As is recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, this attitude and behavior leads to disaster and complete family dysfunction. The opportunity for resilience, and family and national rebuilding is lost and squandered.

There is a strong inclination within each of us to be overwhelmed by challenging circumstances and tragedies. It is not easy to put one's life back together after witnessing an event such as the great flood. Yet, this is exactly what the rabbis pointed out to us as the major difference between Noah and Abraham. Tested ten times, Abraham's resilience never wanes, and he continues to look forward towards accomplishment.

This week's Torah reading indicates another reaction to tragedy with rebellion and an abandonment of principles, beliefs and faith. The generations after the flood, in their anger and despondency over the punishment that Heaven meted out to human kind, rebelled against God and morality by building of the tower of Babel. They knew of God and they knew of the flood, but they rebelled as a sign of their displeasure with what human kind suffered at the hands of Heaven.

It is historically accurate to say that after great wars and tragedies, decades of decadence and immorality suffuse human society. It is this rebellion against what experience should have taught them that leads to further disaster. It is a different symptom of the same malady, the lack of resilience which often engulfs entire societies and, as history has proven, eventually leads to their demise and disappearance.

This description of human behavior as outlined above, is of enormous instruction to us in our time. We are still the generation reminiscent of the sword raised to destroy the Jewish people and endanger the existence of the Jewish national state. Only by our resilience and tenacity in following the lead of our father

Abraham are we guaranteed to have overcome the challenges that face us. ©2018 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

This week's portion describes the famous story in Genesis of the great deluge that destroyed the earth. Why must the narrative tell us about the flood in such great detail? The Torah, very simply, could have told us that the world had turned to evil and that God had no other choice but to destroy all living things. Several answers come to mind.

When thinking about the deluge most of us conjure up an image of a God who is vengeful seeking to punish with great brutality the entire world. But the extent of the narrative indicates a very different message. Far from God being a God of retribution, the length of the descriptions teaches that God is a God of compassion who actually hesitated to destroy the world. Thus Nehama Leibowitz divides the section prior to the flood into six paragraphs. The tedious discussion of what God goes through before allowing the waters to come down reveals a God who waits until the last instant to eradicate the world - hoping against hope that humankind would repent. Indeed, on the morning of the flood, the Torah says, "and rain (not a flood) was upon the earth." (7:12) Rashi tells us that the great flood began as only rain because, even at the last moment, if humanity would have repented God would have turned the waters into a rain of blessing.

It is noteworthy that there is a similar phenomenon that takes place in the narrative describing Noah's exit from the ark. The detailed and deliberate style may indicate an uncertainty on the part of Noah. Having experienced "the deluge," Noah hesitated to start over, wondering and worrying why he should exit and start the world anew. After all, more destruction could be around the corner. Note that God commands Noah to leave the ark with his wife so that he could cohabit and continue to live as a family. Noah, however, exits with his sons, while his wife leaves with their daughters-in-law as they could not fathom living together as husband and wife and continuing the human race. (Genesis 8:16,18)

One other thought. Maybe the flood narrative is extended to parallel the Genesis story, which is actually extremely similar to ours. Just as the world started with water, so too did water flood the earth. Just as God first created light, so too the only light in the world was in the ark itself. Just as the Torah details God's creation of animals, so too does the narrative detail Noah's taking the animals out of the ark. It is almost as if the world

started all over again. Not coincidentally, after going forth from the ark God tells Noah that he should procreate, control the earth and be on a special diet. (Genesis 9:1-3) Blessings of procreation, control and diet were also given to Adam. (Genesis 1:28-29)

Yet, there is one significant difference between the creation story of Adam and of Noah. In the beginning God creates alone. When Noah leaves the ark to start beginning the world again, Noah participates in creation by immediately planting a vineyard.

The creation with Noah as a partner may be almost a repairing of the first version, where God alone created. Being given something and taking part in its creation are two different things. Once involved, one feels a sense of responsibility. For this reason Noah stands a greater chance of succeeding than Adam. And while soon after Noah the earth suffers in the dramatic incident of the Tower of Babel, still the earth is not destroyed as it was in the deluge. Progress had been made and still more progress would be made once Abraham and Sarah come on the scene.

One may claim that Noah failed in his task of creation, for the only mention of Noah after the flood is his becoming drunk. But it is not so simple. After devastation it is not easy to begin again. In that sense, I would claim that Noah clearly succeeded. His creation was a resounding success even while it was done with complex feelings and emotions.

We similarly must understand the strength and commitment of those who went on after the Shoah to recreate as well. After witnessing destruction with their very eyes, so many assumed responsibility and rebuilt their lives in Israel and throughout the world. That is the type of creation that is truly everlasting. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Chamei Teverya

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

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

In Jewish law, when we refer to a source of heat we are referring to fire. Thus if we are discussing cooking on Shabbat, or the roasting of the Pascal lamb, or the prohibition of cooking milk and meat together, we refer to acts performed with fire or any derivative thereof. Hence, someone cooking with the hot springs

of Teverya, would not be culpable.

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

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

Another interesting fact; women would be able to use the waters of "Chamei Teverya" for purification purposes, but the waters cannot be used for "Netilat Yadayim" (washing hands before a meal), for the law is that hot water could only be used for "Nitilat Yadayim", if it was once cold and then heated. However water which was always heated (as "Chamei Teverya") cannot be used for "Nitilat Yadayim". However some sages state that the reason the "Chamei Teverya" waters cannot be used for "Netilat Yadayim" is because of the sulfur content which makes it unfit for eating. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"God saw the earth, and behold it had become corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth." (Bereishis 6:12) Imagine being at the beach on a really hot summer day. You choose to put on lots of sunscreen, and remain under the umbrella for as much time as possible. You've learned from the past what overexposure to such a hot sun can do, and how easy it is to not know that it is happening until too late. Few people ever DELIBERATELY get badly sunburned.

The other person on the beach seems to have a different approach. He's out there in the sun, fully exposed. He probably hasn't even bothered to put on any sunscreen, throwing all caution to the wind, or more accurately, the sun. Either he's crazy, or... he has never been sunburned like you have. But, you are sure, after today however he'll probably approach the

situation more like you in the future.

Someone who learns Torah and takes the time to understand what it teaches and why, has a difficult time relating to people who haven't. They look at such people as reckless, because they seem to invest themselves in activities and commodities that are ultimately meaningless, or worse, spiritually destructive. They know that the yetzer hara drives such people, but can't understand why they don't try and resist it in the name of a higher quality of life.

In the meantime, those unlearned in Torah look at the lifestyle of the learned and see waste. They see people who sacrifice available and enjoyable pleasures of this world for the promise of eternal pleasures they have no proof even exist. They see people who exercise self-discipline in areas of life that don't seem to offer much reward in the here-and-now. The odd person might investigate further and, over time, come to see differently, but most people just reject and write off the Torah way of life.

This was the story of the Great Flood of 2105 BCE. Noach learned Torah, in whatever form it existed prior to Mt. Sinai. He knew God existed. He understood that life was for tikun. He made sacrifices to enhance his spiritual growth in a generation that approached life in the opposite way. He couldn't relate to them and they definitely could not relate to him.

The ark took 120 years to build, and eventually became a conversation piece. "Watcha building there, Noach?" they would ask as they passed by, or came specifically to see the spectacle. That's when Noach would launch into a whole speech about life from God's perspective, and what would happen to mankind if they did not get with the program.

They just couldn't relate. They didn't WANT to relate. Relating to Noach and his lifestyle meant too massive a life change, and sacrifices they were not prepared to make. So, instead, they ridiculed Noach and his warnings, and promised to destroy the ark. Even if a great flood did occur, they reasoned, they had the means to survive it.

The flood DID arrive, and they did NOT have the means to survive it. Though it may have appeared as just a bad storm in the beginning, at some point it had to have become clear that Noach's prophecy might have in fact been accurate. And, if what he warned about was coming true, then his take on life must also be true... They learned their lesson, just TOO late.

Mankind has always been in the middle of a difficult battle of WANT versus COST. Contrary to the popular saying, the best things in life are NOT free, but have to be WORKED for. If something "good" is free, then a person should think twice about it and question how "good" it really is. The snake's idea of good ended up being a lot different than God's, and all parties paid the price for the mistake in the end. They learned their lesson, just TOO late.

"What will it COST me?"

It's a simple question, with a far more complicated answer. Buying a new house is easier because if it is a mistake it will become apparent, and recovering from it, though difficult, is possible. Marrying the wrong person can be catastrophic but, for the most part, recoverable. Making a mistake about what counts most in life is not only disastrous, but many times unrecoverable. Billions of people have gone to the graves never understanding their mission in life. ©2018 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

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

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

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

What do we learn from this? We are all affected by our environment. When we are close to people of good character, we are automatically influenced in positive directions. Choose well your friends and your community -- they strongly impact your life! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin.* ©2018 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Towering Sin

Three major destructions take place in Sefer B'reishit, two of which take place in this week's parasha. In chronological order we see the Mabul, the Flood, the Dor Hahaflaga, The generation of the separation because of the Tower of Bavel, and the Mahapachat S'dom, the overturning of Sodom. The Mabul was a punishment for the world becoming corrupt with immorality, idolatry, and robbery. The Mahapachat S'dom was in punishment for its bestial depravity in immorality and its treatment of the poor and needy within its own society. Here, however, in the Dor Hahaflaga, it is very difficult for us to understand

exactly what was the cause of this punishment and how this punishment is viewed.

The meforshim differ greatly in their understanding of the sin of the people of Bavel since the building of the Tower was more a symptom of the problem and not the actual cause for the destruction that followed. "And the whole earth was of one language and of unified words." HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch comments that it was natural for people to form groups and that each group, although speaking a common language, spoke in its own dialect. The people were unified because their language followed the same spiritual outlook as their neighbors.

"And it was when in their travels from the East they found a valley in Shinar and they settled there." The Rabbis interpret the term mikedem (from the East) to also mean "from the past" which would indicate not just leaving but a break from previous generations. The people purposefully set out to live in a valley when previously everyone lived in the mountains. In the mountains there were large stones that could be used for building, but in the valley, they would need to create their own building materials. "And they said each one to his neighbor, let us build bricks and we will burn for a fire and the brick will be for them for stone and the mortar for plastering." Nechama Leibovitz quoted the commentary of Benno Jacob to show that these technological advances enabled these men to discard the need for the natural resources supplied by Hashem and to break the burden of subservience to a Supreme Being.

"And they said come let us build for ourselves a city and a tower and its head in the heavens and we will make for ourselves a name lest we be dispersed across the whole earth." Nechama Leibovitz explains that this building was done by Nimrod who was the first dictator. Prior to his time there were no individual possessions. Everyone worked together to raise the food of the community. Nimrod changed all that because he was a hunter who imprisoned others with his cunning. He encouraged the building of an edifice as a means of inspiring his people to look upon themselves as if they were as important as Hashem. Hirsch finds nothing wrong in building a tower or a city in itself. He examines the words "and we will make for ourselves a name." Hirsch wonders for whom are they making a name. It cannot be for the other people as this is referring to all of the people who are with Nimrod. Hirsch reasons that it must be referring to Hashem to say that they are as important as He. They choose to no longer be governed by the laws of Hashem since they feel that they are now on equal footing.

A second sin of the Tower and the city was the imposition by the government of a set of values on the community which, according to Hirsch, "had no value and meaning if weighed in the scales of the laws of morality." An individual may deviate from the strict laws

of morality in a particular situation (i.e., bending the Truth to avoid insulting someone: the bride is beautiful even if not true) but a society does not have that permission. The people were afraid of being spread around the world, but this would not matter if the only purpose of the society was to raise the level of moral consciousness and cooperation. The smaller the community, the greater chance that this community morality could function efficiently. In a larger society with its own set of values, these values can be misguided. The Midrash tells us that if a man fell from the top of the levels of the Tower, no one would notice, but if a brick fell, the people sat down to weep crying "when will another brick be brought to replace this one."

The Ramban noted that characteristic Divine name used throughout the Dor Hahaflaga is Hashem, the merciful name of the Supreme Being, whereas at the Mabul it was Elokim, the name which connotes justice without mercy. The immorality of the people of the Mabul was so great that no mercy could be shown to them. The sin here in Bavel was neither a physical one nor a social one as there was no disruption of the peace and the people were still united. Hirsch added that the sin here was against the future of Mankind "which is dependent on the recognition of the priceless value and moral importance of the individual." This is what was endangered by Nimrod's thinking and plans. There was no need to destroy these people but it was necessary to separate them so that Nimrod's ideas would not be pervasive among them.

Rashi adds a post script to our discussion. He asks, "which sin is more severe, the generation of the flood or the generation of the disunion?" The generation of the flood was filled with thieves and robbers but they did not rebel against a fundamental precept of Hashem. They were unable to live with each other because of their behavior towards their fellowman. For this reason, they were destroyed. But the generation of the Haflaga was a people who were peaceful towards each other. Rashi explains that the use of the word "scattered" twice indicates that they were scattered in this world and in the world to come. They would lose Olam Haba, the World to Come, because they acted to destroy the fundamental worth of the individual.

It appears from our study that the importance of the individual is sacrosanct. Society may be good as long as it only acts to preserve the morality of the society through the laws which it passes. Whenever the society works to minimize the importance of the individual, it fights against a principle which is so important that it endangers the basic responsibilities of the individual towards his own morality. When society places itself above the individual it must be continuously vigilant to preserve the morality of the Torah and the ideals of the Torah through its laws. When a society decides to create its own morality, it

endangers every individual within it. © 2018 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Tire of Babel

The Flood was history. The era of robbery, greed, and corruption was washed away by its powerful waves. Peace and tranquility reigned. The entire world was now united -- against the Almighty.

The world community decided that in the interest of harmony they would join forces and build a colossal tower to reach to the heavens. Then they would ascend the tower and do battle with G-d Himself.

It was an ambitious dream, but they were united and determined.

Hashem, however, had other plans. The Torah tells us that He convened the same tribunal He consulted with in creating man and this time decided that He would not destroy the builders. He would confuse them. He changed their languages so they were not able to communicate. One man would ask for a hammer and receive a nail, a saw, or a blank stare. Enraged, the requestor would then argue with and even strike his fellow builder who was impeding progress. Eventually a small civil war erupted on the construction site. The men dispersed and the construction project was eternally halted. And seventy distinct nations ultimately emerged.

It is puzzling: how does a problem such as lack of communication stop a lofty project of such tremendous scope? Didn't the French and British jointly finish the Chunnel, the tunnel that connects the two countries, under the English Channel?

I once asked my rebbe, Reb Mendel Kaplan, who after escaping from the Nazi inferno lived in Shanghai, China for nearly five years, how he was able to communicate with the Chinese. He held up a dollar. "Everybody understands this language," he said.

Don't people of different languages manage to communicate when they want to realize a noteworthy mission? Why was there no way to gather the forces, create new communication techniques, and continue the project?

A college professor was known give difficult tests yet he had a very lenient policy. If a student missed the exam he could take a make-up test the next day. The make-up, however, was always the same test the professor had given the day prior.

15 minutes before the final exam, of a particularly difficult semester, the professor received a phone call. The four voices crowding the phone booth sounded desperate.

"Professor, we were on our way to take your final and we got a flat tire. Please let us take a make-up exam tomorrow." "Certainly," the professor responded.

The next day the four young men walked in feeling quite smug. They had reviewed the entire final

with a friend who had taken it the day before. The professor seated the four students in different corners of the room. He placed a single sheet of paper in front of each one and stated crisply.

"Today's make-up exam entails just one question. I would like you young men, each in his own way, to write down for me..." he looked at the young men and smiled knowingly -- "which tire was flat?"

When the goal entails truth and true good for mankind, when the goals are harmonious with the concepts that transcend culture, language, custom, or vogue, then nothing can impede success.

But when selfishness rules and individual glory and gratification is the motivation, then the simplest problem can cause total disunity, contempt, and ultimately failure.

When our common goals are enveloped in common good, then we can unite under the most difficult of circumstances. However, if our motivations are selfish, the slightest impediment will leave our entire project and mission flat. As flat as the tire of Babel. ©2018 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

The world is devastated, every last vestige of civilization washed away by the Great Flood. There are no people, no buildings, no roads, no crops, no cultivated land, only a great wooden ark perched incongruously on a mountaintop.

The door to the ark slowly swings open, and Noah steps out onto dry land for the first time in forty days. He looks about him at the endless expanse of ruination, and he realizes he must begin the work of reconstruction immediately. What does he do? The Torah relates, "And Noah, man of the earth, demeaned himself and planted a vineyard; he drank of the wine and became drunk." One thing led to another. Noah's son Ham took advantage of his father's inebriated condition and acted disgracefully toward him, thereby giving rise to the curse of Ham and his son Canaan.

The point of this entire episode is clearly to give the historical background for the depravity that would characterize Canaanite society, the nemesis of the Jewish people, for thousands of years. Why then wasn't it sufficient to tell us simply that Noah became drunk? Why does the Torah find it necessary to tell us that he obtained wine for his cups by planting a vineyard? And what if he had had a barrel stored away on the ark? Would the situation have been any different?

Furthermore, the Torah seems to imply that Noah debased himself by the very act of planting a vineyard, even before he drank the wine and became drunk? Why did planting a vineyard debase him?

The commentators explain that a person is a complex mass of interests, biases and drives that often obscure the true nature of his soul, very often even

from himself. Going off in all directions, some good and some not so good, pursuing this, that and the other, he presents a confusing, multi-hued image. Which of those manifestations represent the real identity that lies within? It is difficult to determine. But there are some defining moments when he does not find it necessary to posture for other people and he is able to focus completely on his own interest. It is moments like these that the true nature of his essence becomes manifest.

Noah spent forty tempestuous days in the close confines of the ark, and now for the first time, he once again sets foot on terra firma. As he looks around at the vast wasteland, where is his head? What thoughts and issues occupy his mind? What is the first thing he does? He plants a vineyard. So that is his true nature! That is what lies closest to his heart. And so by the very act of planting a vineyard Noah had already debased himself, long before he actually became drunk. And this debasement of his inner core, this lack of self-respect, triggered the awful disrespect of his son Ham.

A young man once came to a great sage and asked to become his disciple. "Please step into the synagogue for a moment," said the sage.

A few moments later, the young man returned.

"What did you see there?" asked the sage.

"I saw a foul-smelling window washer," he replied.

"I see," said the sage. "I'm afraid I cannot accept you."

"But why?" the young man protested. "Is it my fault that the fellow hasn't had a bath in a month?"

"My dear young friend," said the sage, "a high-minded man would have seen the beautiful ark, the holy books piled on the tables, the flickering eternal flame. Only a mean-spirited person would focus immediately on the foul smells emanating from the window washer."

In our own lives, we are constantly dealing with the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary society. Very little is clearly black and white, and we often find ourselves making all sorts of compromises and accommodations. But we should always ask ourselves what we are deep inside. Where are our minds? Where are our hearts? As long as we are essentially spiritual and altruistic, as long as the values and ideals of the Torah are the focus of our lives, we will always find ourselves uplifted and enriched, regardless of the environment in which we find ourselves.

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