

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

Noach's ark contained eight adults; Noach, his wife, their three sons, and their sons' wives (Beraishis 7:13). Rashi (18:32) implies (see also Rabbeinu Bachye on 6:14 and the Zohar quoted by the Be'er Basadeh on 5:32) that had there been ten righteous adults rather than only eight, the entire generation would have been saved. However, Rashi also tells us (5:32) that G-d didn't allow Noach to have children until he was 500 years old so that they would all be younger than 100, the age that people were held accountable for their actions before the Torah was given. Why couldn't Noach have had children any earlier, so that they would be more than 100 years old? Because "if they are wicked they will be destroyed by the water, and this would be bad for this righteous one (Noach), and if they are righteous, I will [have] cause[d] him to be burdened with [the task of] building many arks." Several commentators ask why Noach would have had to build additional arks if having more children (at least one more plus his or her spouse) would bring the total to ten, whereby the flood would have been averted.

The Tzaidah Laderech (5:32) quotes the Zohar saying that Noach didn't beseech G-d to save his generation, and it could be suggested that just as it was Avraham's prayer that would have saved Sedom, so too only in conjunction with prayer would ten righteous individuals have protected the world. However, Rabbeinu Bachye (6:14) is adamant that Noach was not wrong for not praying, since he knew that there were only eight, which wasn't enough even with prayer. Apparently, had there been ten, he would have prayed, so Noach's lack of prayer can't be the reason why having ten would mean building more arks rather than there being no flood. (Besides, if it was the lack of prayer that was the problem, Avraham couldn't have known from Noach that praying for eight doesn't help.)

The Levush says that although it is true that with prayer having ten righteous individuals would have prevented the flood, since G-d doesn't run the world based on His absolute knowledge of what will happen, He couldn't allow Noach to have more descendents whereby not having to build more arks depended on his praying. However, based on this logic, the possibility that any of his sons would not be righteous should have

been enough to not rely on there being ten righteous individuals to protect everyone else.

The Taz says that having ten righteous individuals wouldn't negate the decree, only prevent it from taking effect. Since if any of the ten lost their "righteous" status, the flood would come, Noach would have had to build the arks anyway, to be ready in case they become necessary.

The Maskil Ledovid and the Be'er Basadeh say that although the possibility that there would be more people in Noach's family that needed to be saved (thus requiring additional arks) was something that had to be taken into account, it would be unrealistic to expect that there could be ten individuals on the high level of righteousness necessary to protect the world. However, being that the eight in Noach's family weren't enough because of how many there were (or weren't) rather than their level of righteousness, I'm not sure why there wouldn't be a reasonable possibility that additional ones would be righteous enough as well.

The Nachalas Yaakov and the Tzaidah Laderech suggest that just as ten righteous individuals would only have saved one of the five cities by Sedom (see Rashi on 18:29), so too would ten righteous individuals in Noach's family only have saved their city. They would have therefore needed to build many arks in order to house all of those in that city while the flood destroyed the rest of the world. The Be'er Basadeh doesn't accept this approach because Rashi's wording (on 18:32) is that eight can't protect "their generation," and the wording of his source (Beraishis Rabbah 49:13) is that eight couldn't protect "the world," implying that had there been ten everyone would have been spared, not just Noach's city. [Ten only protecting one city by Sedom while protecting the whole world by Noach might be because of the level of righteousness of Noach and his family (who would be surrounded by the wicked wherever they lived) vs. that of those that lived in Sedom (who could have moved to a better community), or it could be a product of there not yet being "cities" until after the dispersion following the attempt to build the Tower of Bavel.]

The Chasam Sofer, discussing why G-d chose an ark to save Noach and his family, says that being locked up for the year in prison-like conditions while the world was destroyed was a form of punishment for Noach not having a more positive affect on his environment. Based on this, it can be suggested that

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even if there were ten righteous individuals in his family, the rest of the world being "saved" from destruction couldn't be less severe than how Noach himself was saved. Therefore, everyone would have had to take refuge in an ark, requiring many, many arks. Watching the earth go through the flood (which they had been warned about for hundreds of years, see Rashi on 4:24 and on 6:14) and having a year to contemplate what their fate should have been seems worthwhile. Nevertheless, their deserved punishment came instead because there were less than ten righteous individuals. The bottom line, though, is that despite the fact that had there been ten everyone would have been saved, many arks would still have had to be built in order to save them.

The starting point of the question was that had Noach had children earlier, there could have been more righteous individuals in the world before the flood would have come. However, even though he didn't have children until he was 500 years old, he still only had three children. If Noach was destined to have more than three children, he could have had them before the flood and they still would have all been under 100 years old. Even after the flood, Noach curses Cham's fourth child, Canaan (see 9:24-25 and 10:6) before he has any more children, and he has none afterwards either. If Noach was going to have any more children, he certainly could have had them after Cham was born, before the flood, or after the flood, before Canaan was born. It would be reasonable to suggest that the issue was not whether or not Noach would have any more children before the flood, but whether or not he would have any grandchildren before the flood. If he his children were born earlier, they would likely have had children too. If these grandchildren were less than 100 years old, they would be saved from the flood in the merit of their righteous parents, just as Noach's children were saved in his merit. But each of his children would have merited their own ark; one for Shem, his wife and children, one for Cham, his wife and children, and one for Yefes and his wife and children. In other words, there would be a need for numerous arks, but still only eight righteous adults; not enough to save the world, but a task large enough that G-d didn't want to burden Noach with it. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

Is Judaism a universal religion, with a message for all of humanity, or a national religion, with a message specifically for Jews?

Unlike surviving records of the ancient world, our Bible opens with a universal sweep, introducing G-d as the Creator of the universe - not just of a local area- and the Torah insists that every human being - not just Jew or Israelite - is created in His Divine image: "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1); "And G-d created the human being (Adam) in His image, in the image of G-d created He him, male and female created He them" (Gen 1:27).

Adam - the first human being - was then placed in the Garden of Eden and given one commandment, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, leaving the judgment of what is good and what is evil to G-d's objective decision rather than to the subjective desire of the individual. Had Adam and Eve obeyed the Divine command, this world would have merged with the eternal world, and Eden would have remained the human universe. But alas Adam failed and humanity was banished from the perfectly harmonious haven called Eden. Exiled from an eternal life in close proximity to G-d, the ten generations that follow Adam descend into an even deeper depravity. The final result is that G-d recants having created humanity, and decides to destroy the world with a flood.

Our Biblical portion opens with the one righteous individual who - together with his family and representative creatures of the earth - was deemed worthy of rescue from the deluge, Noah, effectively a second Adam. Through Noah, G-d gives humanity a second chance to redeem itself. He blesses Noah with the same blessing He initially bestowed upon Adam, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth..." (Gen. 1:28; Gen 9:1), granting Noah the same dominion over the animal world He had granted Adam. The Almighty goes even one step further: unlike Adam and Eve who were required to eat a vegetarian diet exclusively, G-d permits Noah to express his mastery by being permitted to eat all living creatures.

But G-d gives Noah two additional commandments, very different from the command given to Adam in the Garden: He forbids Noah to eat the flesh and/or the blood of a living animal, and He forbids Noah to carry out self-murder (suicide), or the taking of any human life, "...since G-d created the human being in His Divine image" (Genesis 9:4-6). The Sages of the Talmud add five more Noahide laws: prohibitions against stealing, against adultery (including sexual transgressions such as rape and incest), against blaspheming G-d and against idolatry, as well as the positive directive to establish Courts of Law to see to it

that these six commandments are adhered to (B.T. Sanhedrin 56).

At this point in the Biblical text G-d establishes His first covenant with all of humanity. G-d pledges that "...never again will all flesh be destroyed by a flood," and the sign of this Divine Covenant is indelibly imbedded within nature by the formation of the rainbow in the heavens, often appearing in the sky after a rainfall. (Genesis 9:11-16).

The 12th century Biblical commentary Ramban (Nahmanides) has a striking explanation for the symbol of the rainbow: ancient cultures fought their wars with the bow and arrow, and the side which surrendered, pursuing peace instead of war, would express their will to do so by raising an inverted bow that the enemy could see. Similarly, G-d places an inverted bow in the heavens as a sign that He is no longer warring against humanity.

In the 19th century, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch suggested an even deeper meaning to the rainbow's symbolism. When we look upon the glorious colors of the rainbow, we are dazzled by the red, orange, yellow, green, blue indigo and violet. In truth, however, these colors only appear to be different hues and shades; they are all light refractions of white, the one true base of all of them. So too with the cosmos of humanity, so many peoples of different colors and diverse ethnic backgrounds, all emanating from the "womb" of the one G-d who created them, who all are united by the spark of the Divine which gives them life.

Whatever the symbolism, it's clear that the rainbow is a half-picture, lacking a second half to complete the circle of wholeness. G-d can pledge not to destroy humanity, but since He created humanity with freedom of choice, He cannot guarantee that humanity will not destroy itself, especially in our global village when a mad Ahmadinejad publicly and unashamedly threatens the stability of the world by seeking the destruction of the Jewish nation. Much of the world looks on quietly, acquiescently, even investing in Iranian oil, thereby speeding up the process of Iran mastering nuclear power, a nightmarish prospect as we watch Ahmadinejad's trigger finger inch its way toward the button.

That is why G-d's half-circle bow must be predicated upon humanity's acceptance of the seven Noahide laws of morality which precede it, at least the prohibition against murdering innocent people. For the world to endure, everyone need not be Jewish, but everyone must be moral! Human life must be seen as sacred and inviolable!

If this interpretation is correct, it means that at the very least the Noahide laws must be disseminated throughout the world. Tragically, Noah failed; at the end of his life he falls prey to alcoholism, and the ten generations which follow were again filled with debauchery and depravity. G-d is true to His world; He

destroys the especially wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah but preserves the world intact. Finally there is a third attempt to bring about redemption, this time through Abraham, the first Hebrew-Israelite Jew, establishing a covenant with him and his descendants, eventually charging the descendants with 613 commandments in order to forge them into a "holy nation and a Kingdom of priest-teachers (to the world)." G-d guarantees that Abraham's progeny will never be destroyed and that - from the backdrop of their land of Israel and Jerusalem-the world will learn to accept a G-d of love, morality and peace. G-d's initial charge to Abraham includes this Jewish mission to the world: "I will make you a great nation...; I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you, I shall curse; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Genesis 12: 2,3).

Maimonides, the greatest Jewish legalist-philosopher in history, codifies the Jewish mission to the world: "Moses is to bequeath the 613 commandments only to the Israelites, as it is written, 'a heritage for the congregation of Jacob' (Deut 33:4), but similarly (and of equal importance) did the Almighty command Moses (to teach and if necessary to enforce) all of the Noahide commandments to all of humanity..." (Laws of Kings, 8,10). Yes, humanity doesn't have to be Jewish, but it must be moral for a free world to endure. © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**N**oach was one of the people mentioned by Midrash as having seen the world built and functioning and then destroyed and then rebuilt once more. Surviving such a scenario in a normal fashion is an almost impossible task. And, Noach is obviously a victim of what he witnessed. The new world that arises after the disastrous flood that engulfs all human life is a strange one to Noach. He keeps to himself in his vineyard, embittered by the behavior of his offspring and by the refusal of them and their descendants to learn the bitter lessons of the flood and its causes.

Every new world that arises is different than the one that preceded it. Noach is doomed to be disappointed in the new world for he is full of sorrow and nostalgia regarding the old world that is permanently gone and will never again return. The survivors of the flood of our time - the Holocaust - never see, in the world that was rebuilt after that disastrous event, the equal of the world that was destroyed. This is true in all of the varying camps and factions of Jewish society. The new world always pales in comparison with the old world; the past is always brighter and shinier than the present. King Solomon in Kohelet warned us not to think that way "for it is not out of wisdom that you thus ask." Yet the unchangeable

human nature continues to long for the good old days even if, in reality, they might not have really been that good.

Noach's level of righteousness and holiness also seems to slip in the aftermath of the flood. The rabbis allow him to question the judgment of Heaven that inflicted such a tragedy upon so many souls. He somehow forfeits his titles of being righteous, innocent and holy that accompanied him before the deluge. I feel that it is not his faith in G-d that is shaken as much as his faith in himself. Why was he spared? What does G-d want him to do now in the newly emerging and troubled world?

He was powerless to prevent the first flood so what can he now do to prevent a second debacle from engulfing humankind? Noach feels himself to be an archaic remnant of a past civilization and completely without influence in the new world arising before his eyes. To a certain extent therefore, he gives up on shaping the new world, letting the baser instincts of human beings again drag down human society. He does not exploit his status as the lone survivor of the flood, the person who knows better than anyone else what society needs.

That is what the rabbis meant when they criticized Noach for planting a vineyard as his first project after the flood. He should have created a school of learning and taught a generation the path of holiness and divine inspiration. It is this failure of will and initiative, of misplaced priorities and of unwarranted pessimism that is held against him. He could have been the bridge between the old world and the new. Instead he ended up not being the force for good in either of the worlds. It will remain for Avraham to fill that role ten generations later. ©2008 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**O**ne time I returned from a meeting to find a Meter Maid (does anyone still use that name?) writing a parking ticket for my car. When she looked up, I smiled and said, "This is my car. When you finish writing the ticket, you may give it to me." She looked completely puzzled... and then asked in disbelief, "You're not going to yell at me for writing the ticket?" "No," I replied, "I thought I had enough money in the meter. I was wrong. I'm late. I deserve the ticket." She stood in disbelief... and then she tore up the ticket saying, "All day long people yell and scream at me not to write a ticket; I can't write a ticket to the one person who treats me like a human being."

Life is like a mirror. The people you see reflect back to you the way you present yourself. If you look happy, they will respond buoyantly. If you look upset, they will be cautious or concerned. If you want a joyous life try to be happy around others. It will make it easier on them and more enjoyable for you. (Remember, everyone causes happiness... some when they come, some when they leave.)

The Torah teaches us, "Love your fellow human being as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). It is often translated as "Love your neighbor as yourself." However, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter taught that while the words "neighbor" and "fellow human being" are often used synonymously, in everyday speech the word "neighbor" is used to denote someone living or located nearby, while the obligation of this commandment includes a complete stranger who lives far away.

The general rule for this commandment is that anything you would want others to do for you, you should do for others (Rambam, Hilchos Aivel 14:1). The great Hillel once taught a convert, "That which is hateful to you, do not do unto others. That is the basis of the Torah. (Shabbos 31a). The Baal Shem Tov used to say, "Love your fellow man as yourself-though you have many faults, nevertheless, you still love yourself. That is how you should feel toward your friend. Despite his faults, love him."

I once saw a handprinted sign written with a marker on a large piece of posterboard. It was on the wall of a 90 year old woman's apartment. I thought that you might enjoy it... perhaps even benefit from it!

A smile costs nothing... but gives much. It enriches those who receive it without making poorer those who give it. It takes but a moment. However, the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it. And none is so poor that he can't be made rich by it.

A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters goodwill in business... and is the countersign of friendship. It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad. It is Nature's best antidote for trouble.

A smile cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen. It is something of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours. None needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.

The story of one righteous man in an evil generation. The Almighty commands Noah to build the ark on a hill far from the water. He built it over a period of 120 years. People deride Noah and ask him, "Why are you building a boat on a hill?" Noah explains that there will be a flood if people do not correct their ways (according to the comedian Bill Cosby, Noah would ask "How well can you tread water?"). We see from this the patience of the Almighty for people to correct their ways

and the genius of arousing people's curiosity so that they will ask a question and hopefully hear the answer.

The generation does not do Teshuva, returning from their evil ways, and G-d brings a flood for 40 days. They leave the ark 365 days later when the earth has once again become habitable. The Almighty makes a covenant and makes the rainbow the sign of the covenant that He will never destroy all of life again by water (hence, James Baldwin's book, *The Fire Next Time*). When one sees a rainbow it is an omen to do Teshuva-to recognize the mistakes you are making in life, regret them, correct them/make restitution, and ask for forgiveness from anyone you have wronged as well as from the Almighty.

Noah plants a vineyard, gets drunk and then occurs the mysterious incident in the tent after which Noah curses his grandson Canaan. The Torah portion concludes with the story of the Tower of Babel and then a genealogy from Noah's son, Shem, to Abram (Abraham).

The Torah states: "Noah walked with the Almighty" (Genesis 6:9). What lesson about life is the Torah teaching us through this verse? What does it mean that Noah "walked" with the Almighty?

Rabbi Obadia Sforno, a classic commentator, explains that Noah walked in the Almighty's ways, which means to do good to others. How? The people acted corruptly and Noah tried to teach them how to improve their actions.

There are different levels in helping others. We find in the Rambam (Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Gifts to the Poor 10:7-14) that there are eight levels of giving tzedakah (the Hebrew word used for charity; there is no word in Hebrew for charity. Tzedakah means "justice, righteousness.") The highest level is to help a person earn a living on his own. Why is this the highest level? When one helps a person become self-sufficient, he is helping him not just once, but for the rest of his life. Similarly, when you help someone become a better person you are not just helping him for the moment; you are helping him accomplish more his entire life.

Not only will he do many more good deeds, but there will be a positive influence on his children and grandchildren. The more elevated a person is the more he will share his high ideals with his family. You are helping this person's future generations! Strive to do the ultimate-help others to become better people. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2008 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

**B**etween the creation of the universe and the call to Abraham the Torah tells four stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the generation of the flood, and the tower of Babel. Is there any

connection between these stories? Are they there merely because they happened? Or is there a deeper underlying logic? As we will see, there is.

The first is about Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit. Once they have eaten, and discovered shame, G-d asks them what they have done. This is the conversation that ensues:

"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 G-d said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'

"The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"

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 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 G-d: "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.'"

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 a righteous man but not a hero. He is born to great expectations. "He will comfort us," says his father Lamech, giving him his name. Yet Noah does not save humanity. He only saves 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 last scene we see him drunk: in the words of the Midrash, "he profaned himself and became profaned." You 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 story of the Tower of Babel. What was the sin of its builders? There are two key words in the text. It begins and ends with the phrase *kol ha'aretz*, "the whole earth." 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 G-d created heaven and earth." Heaven is the domain of G-d; 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 G-ds. What does this have to do with responsibility?

Not accidentally does the word responsibility suggest response-ability. The Hebrew equivalent, *achrayut*, comes from the word *acher*, meaning "an other." Responsibility is always a response to something or someone. In Judaism, it means response to the command of G-d. By attempting to reach heaven, the builders of Babel were in effect saying: we are going to take the place of G-d. We are not going to respond to His law or respect His boundaries. We are going to create an environment where we rule, not G-d. Babel is the failure of ontological responsibility-the idea that something beyond us makes a call on us.

What we see in Bereishith 1-11 is an exceptionally tightly constructed four-act drama on the theme of responsibility and moral development. The first thing we learn as a child is that our acts are under our control (personal responsibility). The next is that not everything we can do may we do (moral responsibility). The next stage is the realization 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 (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. Never underestimate the subtlety and depth of the Torah. 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 G-d." © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

#### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

### HaMa'ayan

“**H**owever, your blood which belongs to your souls I will demand...” (9:5)

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) writes: If one dies because of his own misbehavior-for example, if he gets involved in fights-he is destined to account for his soul. Likewise, those who endanger themselves- for example one who walks on thin ice in the winter and falls through and drowns, or if he sleeps in an abandoned building and it collapses on him, or if he starts up with or speaks aggressively to a brute-all of these people are destined to answer to the

Heavenly court for bringing about their own deaths. This is learned from our verse.

In addition, we learn from our verse that, just as one may not cause injury to another person or damage the property of another, so one has no right to injure himself or to damage his own property. This prohibition includes pulling out one's hair from worry and tearing clothes or smashing dishes in anger. (Sefer Chassidim Nos. 675, 676)

R' Eliezer Papo z"l (1785-1826; rabbi of Selestria, Bulgaria) writes: One must take care to eat only to satiation, and not to overeat, for one who follows his belly ("gachon") builds a home ("machon") for the yetzer hara. This is based on the teaching of the kabbalists that every pleasure in this world that is enjoyed for a mundane purpose strengthens the power of the yetzer hara. [Ed. note: This is not meant to prohibit the enjoyment of physical and material pleasures, since most pleasures can be elevated to a lofty purpose.]

From the perspective of mussar / proper behavior, one acts improperly by overeating for several reasons: (1) he is wasting food; (2) he is wasting the time that he spends overeating and the extra time that he later will spend in other physical needs; (3) he will make himself ill; and (4) if he causes his own death, he will be called to account for it.

On the other hand, earlier sages have stated that if one restrains himself from consuming an enticing food, it is as if he fasted and brought a sacrifice on the altar. (Pele Yoetz: Erech "Achilah") © 2008 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he picture of Noah's ark in children's books with a giraffe neck up, hanging out of the ark, speaks to a fundamental question. How did all the animals, birds and creeping things fit into the ark? (Genesis 6:19)

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

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

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

Here Ramban introduces a basic concept concerning miracles. Even when a miracle occurs, humankind must do its share. In the words of Ramban,

"this is the way of all miracles in the Torah....for humankind to do what it can and for the rest to be left in the hands of G-d."

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

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

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

When considering the courage of many Israelis living on the border, who, despite bombardments from the enemy over the years, held their ground and refused to budge, Ramban's comments come to mind. We're not to rely on miracles. But relative to the State of Israel, G-d watches even more closely. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## **Perceptions**

**"G**-d saw that the world was corrupt, and that all flesh across the land had perverted its ways.

G-d said to Noach, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, since the land is filled with violence. I will annihilate them from the land.'" (Bereishis 6:12-13)

And, so He did, each and every last descendant of Kayin, just as G-d had foretold, and just as Noach had warned. A lot of good that did, though, because they mocked him until the very end, until the massive door of the ark miraculously closed, and the water became deep enough to make it clear to all those on the outside that yes, the Flood was, in fact, becoming reality.

One can only imagine the tremendous regret they must have felt as the Flood waters swallowed them up, while at the same time lifting Noach and his family to safety above their heads. Unfortunately, it is a lesson that few have taken to heart since then as well,

for the pattern has been repeated several times. First the prototype:

Onlooker: Hey, Noach! Whatcha buildin' up here high in the mountains?

Noach: It's an ark. G-d told me to build it because He plans to bring a Flood to wipe all of you away if you don't repent soon!

Onlooker turned Mocker: Riggggght-and French Fries are good for your health, right?

Now for a little deja vu:

Pharaoh: Who sent you again?

Moshe: G-d, and if you don't let His people go, He's going to destroy all of Egypt with terrible plagues!

Pharaoh: Really? Oh, I can't wait! When does all the excitement begin?

Jewish people: What did you say G-d said again?

Yechezkel: If you don't do teshuvah, He's going to destroy the Temple and exile all of you!

People: Why do you make up such crazy prophecies? G-d would never destroy His temple. You're just a doomsday sayer?

Jewish people: Ah, Mordechai, you always worry too much. If we don't go, what will the king say?

Mordechai: I'm telling you, don't go to the king's feast! It can only bring about bad for our people?

People: Yeah, and whose going to turn on us?

The examples are many, and though the warnings have not always been with words and from people, they have been warnings nonetheless. And, how many times have we heeded the warnings and avoided the foretold destruction?

Too few to have been recorded historically, if they existed at all.

Begin: Iraq is a threat to the free world, and one day you will thank us for our daring mission to blow up the reactor!

VP George Bush: You just jeopardized our relationship with Saddam Hussein! We'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget?

History: You'll learn one the hard way you'll never forget!

Israel: Iran is about to become nuclear, and it will be a problem for everyone.

Let's deal with it now while we can.

America: Nahhhh, it will take a long time before they become nuclear, and dangerous.

Iran: We're almost there, and we can't wait to blow up the whole world, right after we bomb Israel.

Anti-Disengagement: Don't give them Gush Katif. They'll just destroy the place and use it as a base for terrorism.

Sharon and Leftists: Don't be so childish. They'll settle it and you'll see there'll be peace.

AD: Well, it didn't take long of Hamas to destroy Gush Katif and turn it into a base for terrorism, did it?

Yeah, it's the same old story, over-and-over-again. Warnings of impending doom, lots of cognitive dissonance, fulfillment of bad prophecy, and the cycle starts anew. What is it about mankind, and in particular, the Jewish people, that blocks us from owning up to the truth, and fixing history while it is still safe to do so? Is it something missing from our diet?

And, here we go again.

Concerned Jew: Aren't you worried about your safety living in America?

American Jew: Are you kidding? This is the safest place to be a Jew!

CJ: So was Europe, once. That's why, given the choice between remaining in danger in Europe in the 1930s, or fleeing to America, many chose to take their chances in Europe.

AJ: I understand. But that was Europe in the 1930s. This is America in 2008! CJ: But, whenever the financial world collapses, the Jews get blamed, and anti-Semitism returns.

AJ: I know it has in the past-but it won't happen this time. The average American is too civilized to be so anti-Semitic.

CJ: I see. And how do you know for sure? Don't you see how quickly situations change, and how fast gentiles have turned on the Jews before? Don't you see how everything else we thought wouldn't happen again has already occurred?

AJ: Some of it, yes. But, that doesn't mean that the rest of it will go that way?

CJ: But do you admit that it is possible?

AJ: I suppose it is always possible-but I repeat, unlikely.

CJ: But the unlikely has already started to occur. That's why there is such shock throughout the financial community, as past chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, just testified?

AJ: Right, so what is your point?

CJ: My point is this: Dovid HaMelech wrote, "This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23). This means that when the unlikely happens, it is because G-d is making it happen, which means that even more of the unlikely is likely to happen. That's why we're always caught by surprise when it does.

What would you answer to that? Would you buy it, or at least give it some serious consideration, if you were an American Jew, or a Canadian Jew, or a British Jew, etc., and you have invested so much of your life building a world in the Diaspora? Would you start to become concerned about the direction of world events today, and wonder if they really spell the end of what has been, until recently, a very comfortable and profitable exile?

And, if not, why not? What would be your basis of your denial? Fact? Logic? Intuition? Hope? Whatever it is, ask yourself the following question: If I

were writing a book today, paid by a benefactor to devise a credible plot of how life in America could fall apart for the Jew, and even become dangerous, what would I write? What scenario would I devise? You'll probably be surprised how easy it is for you to devise the scenario. You'll probably be shocked at how much history has already provided the backdrop for it to come true, to such an extent that, if you're not careful, you might find yourself becoming somewhat paranoid about living outside of Eretz Yisroel. A little imagination can go a long way for prepping a person for what might actually be reality, a distant one that is far closer than we might like to believe.

The people of Noach's generation never lived to tell. Pharaoh did, and he later became the king of Nineveh. That's why when Yonah came and warned of imminent doom, the people of Nineveh responded with teshuvah, saving their city and their lives. Pharaoh had told them, "Trust me" when G-d threatens, it's worth listening....

Ironically, it is one of the few cases in history when such a story had a happy ending. The question now is, how will history write ours? We're at that critical point in time when perception and choice make a huge difference.

We're at that moment of truth that we, as individuals and as a people, must decide what meaning current events hold in terms of the ultimate goals of the Jewish people and of Creation, and respond accordingly. Negative prophecies don't have to come true. But only if we do what is necessary to turn them into positive ones.

"Rebi Alexandri said: Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi raised the following contradiction: "It says, 'Behold like the clouds of Heaven came one like the son of man' (Daniel 7:13). It is also written, 'Lowly and riding upon a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9). If they merit it, he will come with the clouds of Heaven, but if they do not merit it, he will come upon a donkey." (Sanhedrin 98a)

As to how to do it, that is, turn history into the fulfillment of a positive prophecy, that is the subject of an entire book called, "Geulah b'Rachamim," available online at thirtysix.org. This is not a plug for a book. It is a plug for a happy ending to Jewish history. © 2008 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

