

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Are we naturally good or naturally bad? On this great minds have argued for centuries. Hobbes believed that we have naturally “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.” We are bad, but governments and police can help limit the harm we do. Rousseau to the contrary believed that naturally we are good. It is society and its institutions that make us bad.

The argument continues today among the neo-Darwinians. Some believe that natural selection and the struggle for survival make us, genetically, hawks not doves. As M. T. Ghiselin puts it, “Scratch an ‘altruist’ and watch a ‘hypocrite’ bleed.” By contrast, naturalist Frans de Waal in a series of delightful books about primates, including his favourite, the bonobos, shows that they can be empathic, caring, even altruistic. So by nature are we.

T. E. Hulme called this the fundamental divide between Romantics and Classicists throughout history. Romantics believed that “man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance.” Classicists believed the opposite, that “Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.”

In Judaism, according to the sages, this was the argument between the angels when G-d consulted them as to whether or not He should create humans. The angels were the “us” in “Let us make man ...” The angels of chessed and tzedek said “Let him be created because humans do acts of kindness and righteousness.” The angels of shalom and emet said, “Let him not be created because he tells lies and fights wars.” What did G-d do? He created humans anyway and had faith that we would gradually become better and less destructive. That in secular terms is what Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker argues in *The*

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Better Angels of our Nature. Taken as a whole and with obvious exceptions we have become less violent over time.

The Torah suggests we are both good and bad, and evolutionary psychology tells us why. We are born to compete and co-operate. Life is a competitive struggle for scarce resources. So we fight and kill. But we survive only within groups. Without habits of co-operation and trust, we would have no groups and we would not survive. That is part of what the Torah means when it says, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So we are both aggressive and altruistic: aggressive to strangers, altruistic toward members of our group.

But the Torah is far too profound to leave it at the level of the old joke of the rabbi who, hearing both sides of a domestic argument, tells the husband, “You are right,” and the wife “You are right,” and when his disciple says, “They can’t both be right,” replies, “You are also right.” The Torah states the problem, but it also supplies a non-obvious answer. This is the clue that helps us decode a very subtle argument running through last week’s parsha and this.

The basic structure of the story that begins with creation and ends with Noah is that in the beginning G-d created a universe of order. He then created human beings who created a universe of chaos: “the land was filled with violence.” So G-d, as it were, deleted creation by bringing a flood, returning the earth to as it was at the very beginning when “the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of G-d hovered over the waters.” He then began again with Noah and his family as the new Adam and Eve and their children.

Genesis 8-9 is thus a kind of second version of Genesis 1-3, but with two differences. In both accounts a key word appears seven times, but it is a different word. In Genesis 1 the word is “good.” In Genesis 9 it is “covenant.”

The second is that in both, reference is made to the fact that humans are in the image of G-d, but the two sentences have different implications. In Genesis 1 we are told that “G-d created humanity in His own image, in the image of G-d He created them, male and female He created them.” In Genesis 9 we read, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of G-d has G-d made mankind” (Gen. 9: 6).

The difference is striking. Genesis 1 tells me

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that "I" am in the image of G-d. Genesis 9 tells me that "You," my potential victim, are in the image of G-d. Genesis 1 tells us about human power. We are able, says the Torah, to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air." Genesis 9 tells us about the moral limits of power. We can kill but we may not. We have the power, but not the permission.

Reading the story closely, it seems that G-d created humans in the faith that they would naturally choose the right and the good. They would not need to eat the fruit of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," because instinct would lead them to behave as they should. Calculation, reflection, decision – all the things we associate with knowledge – would not be necessary. They would act as G-d wanted them to act, because they had been created in His image.

It did not turn out that way. Adam and Eve sinned, Cain committed murder, and within a few generations the world was reduced to chaos. That is when we read that "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart." Everything else in the universe was tov, "good." But humans are not naturally good. That is the problem. The answer, according to the Torah, is covenant.

Covenant introduces the idea of a moral law. A moral law is not the same as a scientific law. Scientific laws are observed regularities in nature: drop an object and it will fall. A moral law is a rule of conduct: do not rob or steal or deceive. Scientific laws describe, whereas moral laws prescribe.

When a natural event does not accord with the current state of science, when it "breaks" the law, that is a sign that there is something wrong with the law. That is why Newton's laws were replaced by those of Einstein. But when a human being breaks the law, when people rob or steal or deceive, the fault is not in the law but in the deed. So we must keep the law and condemn, and sometimes punish, the deed. Scientific laws allow us to predict. Moral laws help us to decide. Scientific laws apply to entities without freewill. Moral laws presuppose freewill. That is what makes humans

qualitatively different from other forms of life.

So, according to the Torah, a new era began centred not on the idea of natural goodness but on the concept of covenant, that is, moral law. Civilization began in the move from what the Greeks called physis, nature, to nomos, law. That is what makes the concept of being "in the image of G-d" so different in Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. Genesis 1 is about nature and biology. We are in the image of G-d in the sense that we can think, speak, plan, choose and dominate. Genesis 9 is about law. Other people are also in G-d's image. Therefore we must respect them by banning murder and instituting justice. With this simple move, morality was born.

What is the Torah telling us about morality?

First, that it is universal. The Torah places G-d's covenant with Noah and through him all humanity prior to his particular covenant with Abraham, then later with his descendants at Mount Sinai. Our universal humanity precedes our religious differences. This is a truth we deeply need in the twenty-first century when so much violence has been given religious justification. Genesis tells us that our enemies are human too.

All societies have had some form of morality but usually they concern only relations within the group. Hostility to strangers is almost universal in both the animal and human kingdoms. Between strangers, power rules. As the Athenians said to the Melians, "The strong do what they want, while the weak do what they must."

The idea that even the people not like us have rights, and that we should "love the stranger," would have been considered utterly strange by most people at most times. It took the recognition that there is one G-d sovereign over all humanity ("Do we not all have one father? Did not one G-d create us?" Malachi 2: 10) to create the momentous breakthrough to the idea that there are moral universals, among them the sanctity of life, the pursuit of justice and the rule of law.

Second, G-d himself recognises that we are not naturally good. After the Flood, He said: "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, even though the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on." The antidote to the yetzer (in rabbinic Hebrew, yetzer hara) the inclination to evil, is covenant.

This has a neuroscientific basis. We have a prefrontal cortex, evolved to allow humans to think and act reflectively, considering the consequences of their deeds. But this is slower and weaker than the amygdala (what Jewish mystics called the nefesh habehamit, the animal soul) which, even before we have had time to think, produces the fight-or-flight reactions without which humans before civilization would not have survived.

The problem is that these rapid reactions can be destructive. Often they lead to violence: not only the violence between species (predator and prey) that is

part of nature, but also to the more gratuitous violence that is a feature of the life of most social animals. It is not that we only do evil. Empathy and compassion are as natural to us as are fear and aggression. The problem is that fear lies just beneath the surface of human interaction, and it can overwhelm all else.

Daniel Goleman calls this an amygdala hijack. “Emotions make us pay attention right now – this is urgent – and give us an immediate action plan without having to think twice. The emotional component evolved very early: Do I eat it, or does it eat me?” Impulsive action is often destructive because it is undertaken without thought of consequences. That is why Maimonides argued that many of the laws of the Torah constitute a training in virtue by making us think before we act (Hilkhos Temurah 4:13)

So the Torah tells us that naturally we are neither good nor bad but have the capacity for both. We have a natural inclination to empathy and sympathy, but we have an even stronger instinct for fear that leads to violence. That is why, in the move from Adam to Noah, the Torah shifts from nature to covenant, from tov to brit, from power to the moral limits of power. Genes are not enough. We also need the moral law.
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

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

“Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noah walked together with G-d” (Gen. 6:9) If, indeed, Noah was a righteous, wholehearted partner of G-d, why is he not the first Hebrew? He seems to have had all of the necessary qualifications.

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

While the Bible states unambiguously that Noah was “a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations,” Rashi comments, “And there are those who explicate this phrase to Noah's detriment: In accordance with his generation, he was righteous; had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered anything at all” (Rashi, citing BT Sanhedrin 108). Why this denigration when the Bible itself is so complimentary? Rashi and the midrash even take the next phrase, “He [Noah] walked together with G-d,” to indicate that Noah was lacking: “In the case of Abraham, the Bible says, ‘Walk before Me and be wholehearted’ (Gen. 17: 1). Noah required Divine support to uphold him, whereas Abraham was strong

and progressed with his righteousness on his own [without any need of external support]” (Gen. Raba 30:10). What could possibly cause these commentaries to overlook the positive and seek out the negative? The Maharal of Prague magnificently explains that Abraham and Noah each faced a similar challenge, but they reacted in radically different ways.

When G-d informs Abraham that he is going to destroy the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham immediately challenges the decision and actually debates with the Lord Himself: “Will You then destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are 50 righteous... will You destroy and not forgive the place because of those 50 righteous... [should] the Judge of the entire earth not act justly?... And perhaps there are 45... or 40... or 30... or 20... or 10?” (Gen. 18:23-32) Abraham charges G-d with injustice and then bargains with G-d as if the Almighty were a market vendor, in order to save the wicked city of Sodom.

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

It goes even further than that, however. G-d actually gives in to Abraham's demand. He says specifically, “I will not destroy [Sodom] because of even 10 righteous people” (Gen. 18:32). But as the Torah reports, there were not even 10 righteous in the city: “The men of Sodom surrounded the house [to sodomize the strangers], from the youth to the aged, the entire people from end to end [of the city]” (Gen. 19:4). G-d even invites Abraham to enter into dialogue with Him, saying, “Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?” (Gen. 18:17) G-d then goes on to declare that He has elected Abraham as the first Hebrew because of his sense of justice and righteousness, before inviting Abraham to argue with Him on the basis of these concepts (Gen. 18:18-22).

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

Noah may have been righteous and wholehearted as an individual, but he lacked the

strength and the boldness to confront G-d's decision and to oppose the wicked ways of the world. This characteristic is built into his name, which means "ease." Rashi says that he received that name because he created an easier method of reaping wheat from the ground. G-d elects the one who challenges Him and is willing to go to war to fight the evil terrorists who captured Lot. G-d wants us to swim against the current, to put our lives on the line, in order to perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine. That's what it means to be a Hebrew (Ivri): to stand in opposition on one side (ever in Hebrew), even if everyone – even G-d – stands on the other. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The main character described in this week's Torah reading is naturally Noach himself. I think that the Torah wishes to illustrate, through Noach's personality and his reactions to the impending disaster and to the world afterwards - the challenges of being a survivor.

Everyone who has ever survived a serious challenge or tragedy replays in one's mind what might have been done differently, and whether the tragedy could somehow have been averted. There is always, as well, that element of guilt which every survivor carries with him or her.

Noach had ample warning as to the arrival of the flood – a flood that would destroy civilization as he knew it. There are different opinions in the commentaries to the Torah as to whether Noach really tried to save his surrounding neighbors or whether he was mainly passive, hoping that somehow by publicly building the Ark they would get the message. Whatever opinion we adopt, it is obvious that Noach was unsuccessful in saving his generation from destruction.

That stark fact must have undoubtedly weighed very heavily on Noach in the aftermath of the flood. It explains his superficially strange behavior - planting a vineyard, becoming drunk and being sexually abused – but it does not excuse it. Post-traumatic syndrome is today recognized as a medical disease - a psychological and physical problem.

Almost all servicemen who were engaged in actual combat suffer from it in one way or another. There are grief counselors to help people recover after personal tragedies in their families. But Noach was all alone in the world and there was no one to help him cope with his own survival syndrome.

Coping with sad and difficult events is ostensibly the true measure of a person and of life itself. It is perhaps what the Mishna meant when it described the ten trials of our father Avraham "and he withstood them all." It was not only the trials that made him great but rather the fact that after so many trials he still stood tall and resolute, faithful and graciously kind

to the end.

Avraham was also a survivor but his method of overcoming the survival syndrome was far different from that of Noach. This dichotomy was clearly seen in the past generation when the survivors of the Holocaust made choices regarding their future lives after their liberation. All of them were affected by the horrors they witnessed and in fact endured. Yet their choices as how to pursue life once more became the true mettle of their existence and personality.

Choosing life, family, faith and entrepreneurial, social and national productivity was, for many a survivor, the road to rehabilitation and normalcy. The past was never forgotten and the events could never be erased, but rebuilding life took precedence over all other factors. Adam and Noach both could not overcome the tragedies that previously engulfed them. They became reclusive and lost their drive for leadership and their ability to inspire others. By so doing, they compounded the tragedies that overtook them and forfeited the opportunity to forge an eternal people that would somehow be able to rise above all calamities and fulfill its historic mission. ©2014 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

The 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. ©2012 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Cursed is Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers" (B'reishis 9:25). Why was Canaan cursed if it was his father, Cham who had acted inappropriately (9:22)?

B'reishis Rabbah (36:7) quotes several approaches that address this issue. Rabbi Yehudah says that Noach would have cursed Cham, since he was the one who sinned, but because G-d had already blessed him, along with Noach and his other sons, (9:1), Noach felt he couldn't curse someone whom G-d had blessed, and therefore cursed Cham's son instead. As far as why Canaan was the son of Cham whom Noach cursed, if we include some of the other quoted approaches, this can be addressed as well. For example, Rabbi Nechemya says that Canaan was cursed because he saw what had happened to his grandfather, and told his father about it (see Maharzo); since Noach couldn't curse Cham directly (because he was "blessed"), he cursed the son of Cham who was somewhat involved instead. Ramban (9:18) says that Canaan was Cham's oldest son, and the only one born at the time, so cursing Canaan meant cursing all of Cham's current descendants, and at least one branch

of any future descendants.

Another approach brought in the Midrash to explain why Canaan was cursed instead of Cham is that Cham had prevented Noach from having a fourth son, so Noach cursed Cham's fourth son. (Obviously, this is inconsistent with Ramban.) This approach could also explain why, if Noach couldn't curse Cham directly because of G-d's blessing, he cursed Canaan instead. (Midrash HaGadol says this explicitly; baruch she'kivanti.)

What these possibilities do not explain is how Canaan could suffer for his father's sins. (Seeing his grandfather in a disgraced manner and telling his father doesn't seem to warrant such a harsh punishment, unless he was old enough to have realized on his own that he should have covered his grandfather rather than telling his father about it and having him deal with it. It should be noted that the language of the Midrash Tanchuma and Midrash HaGadol imply that Canaan did sin by telling his father rather than covering his grandfather himself.) However, if Cham himself was cursed, all of his children would have been cursed too (by extension), including Canaan, so limiting the adverse affects of the curse to just Canaan when he would have been affected anyway isn't as problematic. (How children can be affected by their parents' punishment is a separate topic, see Ralbag on Sh'mos 20:5. He compares it to children being in exile when the parents' sins brought about the exile in the first place, and to rich parents losing their wealth whereby their children can no longer benefit from it; the children's "starting point" is affected by the parents' circumstances.) Nevertheless, Radak (B'reishis 9:24) says that Noach, being a prophet, cursed Canaan knowing that he and his descendents would always be wicked.

Others (e.g. Ibn Ezra and S'fornu) say that it was really Canaan who committed the most grievous sins against Noach, not Cham. Cham may have told his brothers about the compromising situation their father had put himself in when he should have covered him himself instead, but Canaan overheard what his father had said, and committed far worse sins, sins deserving of Noach's curse.

Rav Saadya Gaon (9:18, see also Midrash HaGadol) suggests that Cham was constantly referred to as "the father of Canaan." Chizkuni (ibid) says that Canaan was conceived (inappropriately) in the ark during the flood and born shortly afterwards, which would explain why Cham was called (apparently derogatorily) "the father of Canaan." (This would obviously make Canaan the oldest of Cham's sons, and might provide another reason why Noach placed the curse he couldn't give Cham on Canaan.) According to RS"G (9:25), it was Cham who was cursed, not Canaan, as he was the person Noach was referring to when he "cursed Canaan," i.e. the father of Canaan.

[This seems to also be the opinion of the third and fourth approaches quoted in B'reishis Rabbah, although Midrash Tanchuma also quotes the third approach yet says it refers to Canaan, not Cham.]

Whether the curse was directed at Canaan or at Cham would seem to affect how the rest of the verse is read, as the cursed one was made "a servant of servants to his brothers." If Canaan was cursed, his brothers would include (but not necessarily be limited to) his father's other sons, with his uncles being explicitly included in the next two verses. If, however, Cham was the one being cursed, Shem and Yefes were the "brothers" to whom he is a "servant of servants," without there being any indication of Canaan being a servant to Cham's other sons (his literal brothers). Nevertheless, if Canaan was the oldest, and, at the time of this incident, the only son Cham had so far, even if Canaan was the one being cursed, "his brothers" must refer to his uncles.

As far as why Noach repeated that Cham, or Canaan, was a servant to Shem and to Yefes if he already said he was to be "a servant of servants to his brothers" (meaning Shem and Yefes), it could have simply been done for emphasis. It's also possible that Noach didn't curse Canaan, or Cham, in front of Shem and Yefes, so needed to mention the servitude to them directly. Another possibility is that Noach was limiting the servitude by pointing out that Canaan, or Cham, was a "servant of servants," with the second "servants" referring to Shem and Yefes. By calling Cham, or Canaan, the "servant of Shem" and the "servant of Yefes" after calling him a "servant of servants," we are made aware that the reason he is a "servant of servants" is because Shem and Yefes are themselves servants, and must answer to a higher authority; only if they remain servants of G-d, and therefore treat their "servants" with dignity, is it appropriate for their "brother" to be their servant. © 2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb

The Kabbalists answer the basic question of why Hashem created the world with the comforting response of "tevah hatov l'heitiv -- the nature of the Good One is to bestow goodness." Rashi (Breishis 2:4) notes that this world was created with the letter hey which has an opening at the bottom, symbolizing man's descending into oblivion if he is not successful in leading a righteous life. Moreover, we are taught that the world to come is symbolized by the letter yud, the smallest letter, proclaiming that those privileged to go there are the minority of the population. If Hashem is good, and He breathes a living soul of His essence into man, literally a chip off the magnificent spiritual block, then why did He make the world so challenging that only a minority end up succeeding and reaching the world to come?

The high failure rate in this world is further emphasized by the Mishnah (Avos perek 5) which teaches that in the ten generations from Adam to Noach the great majority of the world population did not live a noble life. Similarly, from Noach to Avraham there were again ten generations and again man failed to live up to his potential, and Avraham received the reward that was initially allocated to all of them.

The Ohr Ha-Chaim Hakadosh (Breishis 3:4), in beginning to analyze Adam's sin of eating from the eitz ha-daas, similarly asks why Hashem did not diminish the power and attraction of the yetzer harah thus making man's mastery over it easier and more manageable? His answer is that in accordance with the challenge and effort to defeat the yetzer harah is the reward and benefit for both this world and the world to come. He cites the Mishnah (Avos 5:26) which states, "in accordance with the exertion is the reward."

The Ramchal (Da'as Tvunos 18) teaches that the good which Hashem extends to man is the opportunity to connect with and benefit from the Shechina -- the Divine. To capitalize on this opportunity one must fulfill the six hundred and eleventh commandment (Devorim 28:9) of "v'holachto biderachav -- walking in His ways." Man is to emulate Hashem who is all giving and perform acts of kindness and spirituality.

Were man to receive a reward without performing and accomplishing to earn it, the reward would be "Na'amah d'kisufah -- bread of shame", i.e. degrading and debasing. Perhaps this is what our Rabbis are teaching when they state (Shabbos 127a), "receiving guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence", for it is better to have a relationship with Hashem in a manner of giving, and thereby emulating His exalted character, than to encounter Him by simply being the recipient.

What emerges is the realization that meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in this world are, as stated by the introductory words of Mesilas Yesharim, comprised of overcoming the obstacles and challenges of the evil inclination. Freud taught that man is inherently bad and possesses an ID which yearns for negativity; Judaism says man possesses a yid -- a holy Divine image that enables him to overcome his desire for bad. Man is to emulate Hashem, and as His nature is to do good so too must man use his free will to overcome the desire to do bad and do good instead.

Our initial question assumed that tests and challenges are not really good for man. However, the Ramban in his commentary on the akeida (Breishis 22:1) teaches that Hashem only tests those that can pass the test. Avraham became the great father of our nation because he was tested with ten tests through which he became elevated and actualized his potential. Each individual as well is to be cognizant of the fact that they possess a unique mission and potential and a

unique array of challenges. Our challenges are Hashem's way of offering us His l'heitiv -- His ultimate goodness, which is the opportunity to grow and earn the best of this world and the next. Indeed, the Ohr Ha-chaim cited earlier ends his treatment of this most important concept with the words "praiseworthy is the people for whom this is so". It is all a matter of perspective. ©2010 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood." (66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever

they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones." (57:15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are no specific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective

quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Noach has G-d proclaiming Noach as being both a "Tzaddik" (righteous), and "Tamim" (perfect). What's tricky about that is that the term "Tzaddik" denotes a person that's been accused of something and has been proclaimed righteous, while the term "Tamim" describes a person that required no defense or exoneration. So which one was Noach?

In "Darash Moshe", Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that if you're an individual, working on yourself and no one else, your goal should be to perfect your actions and in using the guidelines of the Torah to achieve that perfection. However, if you're a leader, or in a position to influence others, many times that involves saying or doing things that can sometimes lead to allegations and accusations. For this reason, many people would rather stay away from communal affairs, and lead a quiet life. However, G-d told Noach and us that although Noach could have kept to himself and become perfect, He preferred that we stand up for the Torah even if it means facing opponents because of it. The biggest scholars of our past weren't known as Tamim, but as Tzaddikim (righteous people), because they stood for something. And the best way for us to achieve this goal is to find ONE Mitzvah (consider Sefer HaChinuch, Guard Your Tongue, learning an Aliya a day, helping to make Jewish day school more affordable, outreach, aliyah, supporting abused women and children, etc.) that we're willing to embrace and stand up for. By becoming a "mini-Tzaddik" in this one aspect, may we grow in rank, and one day become Tamim (perfect) Jews. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

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

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

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

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