

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Is there such a thing as an objective basis of morality? For some time, in secular circles, the idea has seemed absurd. Morality is what we choose it to be. We are free to do what we like so long as we don't harm others. Moral judgments are not truths but choices. There is no way of getting from "is" to "ought", from description to prescription, from facts to values, from science to ethics. This was the received wisdom in philosophy for a century after Nietzsche had argued for the abandonment of morality-which he saw as the product of Judaism-in favour of the "will to power".

Recently, however, an entirely new scientific basis has been given to morality from two surprising directions: neo-Darwinism and the branch of mathematics known as Games Theory. As we will see, the discovery is intimately related to the story of Noach and the covenant made between God and humanity after the Flood.

Games theory was invented by one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century, John von Neumann (1903-1957). He realised that the mathematical models used in economics were unrealistic and did not mirror the way decisions are made in the real world. Rational choice is not simply a matter of weighing alternatives and deciding between them. The reason is that the outcome of our decision often depends on how other people react to it, and usually we cannot know this in advance. Games theory, von Neumann's invention in 1944, was an attempt to produce a mathematical representation of choice under conditions of uncertainty. Six years later, it yielded its most famous paradox, known as the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Imagine two people, arrested by the police under suspicion of committing a crime. There is insufficient evidence to convict them on a serious charge; there is only enough to convict them of a lesser offence. The police decide to encourage each to inform against the other. They separate them and make each the following proposal: if you testify against the other suspect, you will go free, and he will be imprisoned for ten years. If he testifies against you, and you stay silent, you will be sentenced to ten years in prison, and he will go free. If you both testify against one another, you will each receive a five-year sentence. If both of

you stay silent, you will each be convicted of the lesser charge and face a one-year sentence.

It doesn't take long to work out that the optimal strategy for each is to inform against the other. The result is that each will be imprisoned for five years. The paradox is that the best outcome would be for both to remain silent. They would then only face one year in prison. The reason that neither will opt for this strategy is that it depends on collaboration. However, since each is unable to know what the other is doing-there is no communication between them-they cannot take the risk of staying silent. The Prisoner's Dilemma is remarkable because it shows that two people, both acting rationally, will produce a result that is bad for both of them.

Eventually, a solution was discovered. The reason for the paradox is that the two prisoners find themselves in this situation only once. If it happened repeatedly, they would eventually discover that the best thing to do is to trust one another and co-operate.

In the meantime, biologists were wrestling with a phenomenon that puzzled Darwin. The theory of natural selection-popularly known as the survival of the fittest-suggests that the most ruthless individuals in any population will survive and hand their genes on to the next generation. Yet almost every society ever observed values individuals who are altruistic: who sacrifice their own advantage to help others. There seems to be a direct contradiction between these two facts.

The Prisoner's Dilemma suggested an answer. Individual self-interest often produces bad results. Any group which learns to cooperate, instead of compete, will be at an advantage relative to others. But, as the Prisoner's Dilemma showed, this needs repeated encounters-the so-called "Iterated (= repeated) Prisoner's dilemma". In the late 1970s, a competition was announced to find the computer program that did best at playing the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma against itself and other opponents.

The winning programme was devised by a Canadian, Anatole Rapoport, and was called Tit-for-Tat. It was dazzlingly simple: it began by co-operating, and then repeated the last move of its opponent. It worked on the rule of "What you did to me, I will do to you", or "measure for measure". This was the first time scientific proof had been given for any moral principle.

What is fascinating about this chain of discoveries is that it precisely mirrors the central principle of the covenant God made with Noah: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

This is measure for measure [in Hebrew, middah keneged middah], or retributive justice: As you do, so shall you be done to. In fact, at this point the Torah does something very subtle. The six words in which the principle is stated are a mirror image of one another: [1] Who sheds [2] the blood [3] of man, [3a] by man [2a] shall his blood [1a] be shed. This is a perfect example of style reflecting substance: what is done to us is a mirror image of what we do. The extraordinary fact is that the first moral principle set out in the Torah is also the first moral principle ever to be scientifically demonstrated. Tit-for-Tat is the computer equivalent of (retributive) justice: Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

The story has a sequel. In 1989, the Polish mathematician Martin Nowak produced a programme that beats Tit-for-Tat. He called it Generous. It overcame one weakness of Tit-for-Tat, namely that when you meet a particularly nasty opponent, you get drawn into a potentially endless and destructive cycle of retaliation, which is bad for both sides. Generous avoided this by randomly but periodically forgetting the last move of its opponent, thus allowing the relationship to begin again. What Nowak had produced, in fact, was a computer simulation of forgiveness.

Once again, the connection with the story of Noah and the Flood is direct. After the Flood, God vowed: "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done." This is the principle of Divine forgiveness.

Thus the two great principles of the Noachide covenant are also the first two principles to have been established by computer simulation. There is an objective basis for morality after all. It rests on two key ideas: justice and forgiveness, or what the sages called middat ha-din and middat rachamim. Without these, no group can survive in the long run.

In one of the first great works of Jewish philosophy-Sefer Emunot ve-Deot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) -- R. Saadia Gaon (882-942) explained that the truths of the Torah could be established by reason. Why then was revelation necessary? Because it takes humanity time to arrive at truth, and there are many slips and pitfalls along the way. It took more than a thousand years after R. Saadia Gaon for humanity to demonstrate the fundamental moral truths that lie at the basis of God's covenant with humankind: that co-operation is as necessary as competition, that co-operation depends on trust, that trust requires justice,

and that justice itself is incomplete without forgiveness. Morality is not simply what we choose it to be. It is part of the basic fabric of the universe, revealed to us by the universe's Creator, long ago. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**E**very creeping thing that lives shall be for you as food like the vegetation of the herbs have I given you everything." (Genesis 9:3) What is the Jewish attitude toward vegetarianism? Despite the penchant for meat meals on Sabbaths and festivals, could it possibly be spiritually preferable for us to be eating rice and beans, cauliflower and carrots?

With the creation of Adam, the Almighty enjoins humanity as well as animals to eat only fruits and vegetables. It is only after the flood and the rescue of Noah that God, after blessing him to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, declares that from now on, he is permitted to eat every creeping thing that lives.

I would argue that this permission is actually a concession. It comes in the wake of God's realization 'that the formation (yetzer) of the heart of the human being is evil from his youth,' God's inescapable conclusion as a result of the perversion and violence that were rampant prior to the flood.¹

This concession to Noah is immediately followed by the command not to eat the limb or drink the blood of a living animal, not to commit suicide and not take human life. In effect, God recognizes that since the urge and ability to destroy has proven itself to be such a basic element of the human personality, let it be expressed in the taking of animal life and not in the destruction of humans.

When viewed from this perspective, our laws of kashrut serve as a limitation to our meat consumption and as a reminder of the basic moral ambiguity involved in eating meat altogether. Many animals, fowl, and fish are completely forbidden, and those that are permitted must be slaughtered in a particular and far more spiritual and humane fashion than the manner in which animals are generally killed throughout the world.

Indeed, the laws of kashrut as expressed within the Bible are certainly related to heightening our sensitivity toward the animal world. It is mostly the carnivorous animals and the birds of prey which are forbidden. Moreover, blood consumption is forbidden. Even the permissible meat must be salted and soaked in order to remove as much blood as possible, for

¹ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik would often say that the Torah not only records the human understanding of the divine, but it also documents God's understanding of and even disappointment with human weakness and corruption.

'blood is life.' Finally, meat and milk cannot be eaten together, with the Polish Ashkenazi custom enjoining as much as a six-hour wait between eating meat (even fowl) and dairy, since 'thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk' [Ex. 34:26] is apparently a plea for compassion and sensitivity extending to the animal world.

The first chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, even sees the Torah as issuing a hidden rebuke to the meat eater. He first explains (in accordance with the interpretation of Nahmanides) that when the Jews were still in the desert, and the Sanctuary (site of the sacrifices) was literally in the midst of the people, the only meat allowed to be eaten was the meat of the sacrifices. Obviously, this limited meat intake. It was only after they left the desert, with many Israelites living far from the Sanctuary, that they would be allowed to eat non-sacrificial meat, but then only in accordance with the limitation of the laws of kashrut.²

Rabbi Kook further explains that within the very words of the Bible lies a hidden admonition: "When the Lord your God will expand your borders...and you shall say 'I will eat meat' because your soul lusts to eat meat..."

It is only because of the 'lust' for meat – not a very complimentary description – that God allowed the Israelites to eat meat. Ultimately, Rabbi Kook argues, in the future period of the Third Temple, we shall return to the original vegetarian ideal and then the only Temple sacrifice will be the vegetarian grain minha offering.

In explaining animal sacrifices in general, Rabbi Kook maintains that the animal world receives its tikkun (perfection) by being brought to God's altar since, being devoid of reason, the animals cannot be uplifted except through an act done to them. In the future, however, when 'knowledge of the Lord will fill the world as the waters cover the seas' [Is. 11:9], an abundance of knowledge will spread and extend even to animal life. And since our prophets teach us that during the messianic age there will be 'no evil or destruction in all of My holy mountain' [Ibid.], it is inconceivable that animal life will be destroyed to serve the divine. At that time, God will 'find the meal offering and vegetable offerings of Judah and Jerusalem sweet' [Malakhi 3:34].

A similar notion is to be found in the writings of Rabbi Haim David Halevi. He maintains – and cites Rabbi Kook as his proof text – that it will only be the first stage of the messianic era that will include animal sacrifices in the Third Temple, since in the first messianic stage the world will be operating as it is now, including sinfulness and the need to atone; however, once the messianic era reaches its spiritual climax of universal repentance, then animal sacrifices will be a mere memory of an earlier and more primitive period.

² Cf. Rabbi Kook's commentary on the sacrificial prayers of each morning, in *Olat Re'iyah* (Jerusalem 1985).

After all, he writes, if there is no sin, what need will there be of animal sacrifice for atonement?

Rabbi Halevi concludes that in the Third Temple period the divine Presence will be revealed in all of its splendor and glory, and there will be no sacrifices other than the non-animal minha offering comprised of meal and oil.

There is a beautiful custom to cover the challah knife while reciting the Grace after Meals in order to highlight our revulsion for an implement that could be used to kill and destroy. May the time soon arrive when our swords will turn into ploughshares and our spears into pruning forks, when there will be no evil or destruction throughout the world, and the only use of knives will be for slicing the challah to be eaten with milk and honey – not meat – in honor of Sabbath and festivals. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinBereishit. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"l

Wein Online

The rabbis were not so much critical of Noach – as he is paid the highest of compliments, throughout the Torah as a righteous person – but they were wary of him. I have often felt that this attitude is born of the idea that Rashi himself states in commenting upon the origin of Noach's name. Rashi makes a point that the name Noach should not be construed as a derivative of the Hebrew word "nacheim" – meaning to comfort – but rather it is derived from the other Hebrew word "noach" – meaning, rest, leisure, comfortable but not comfort as in consolation.

Rashi attributes this understanding of Noach's name to the fact that he was the father, so to speak, of modern agricultural technological advancement and progress. The iron plow, the first great essential tool for farming developed for humans, enabling settlers to abandon a nomadic existence, was an invention of Noach. This was his great contribution towards the advancement of human technology.

Noach therefore becomes the source of human technological progress which grants us leisure, eases our physical workload and gives us many physical comforts in life. However, technology alone with all of its attendant blessings does not guarantee us any sort of mental, spiritual or social comfort. It does not console us in our hour of grief nor does it strengthen our spirit in our moments of self-doubt and personal angst.

If Noach could have achieved these goals then Rashi points out that his name would have been Menachem – the one who brings true consolation and comfort to troubled souls. Hence Noach is viewed in tradition as being incomplete – technologically

advanced but spiritually wanting – in short a pretty accurate description of our current human society.

The Rabbis of the Talmud taught us that if “one tells you that there is wisdom, knowledge and skills present amongst the nations of the world you should believe him.” However, if one tells you that there is Torah amongst the nations of the world, then do not believe him.” Judaism and Jewish society has no basic argument against the advance of technology. We are not the Amish nor are we willing to be consigned a back seat in the drive to physically improve the human condition of life on this planet. Yet Judaism realizes that true psychological and spiritual comfort cannot be found in the latest version of the ipod.

Noach’s technology can be enormously beneficial in a society that adopts Avraham’s values and beliefs. But bereft of any spiritual focus or restraint, technology run wild makes our world a more fearful place to inhabit and forces many to yearn for the good old, less technologically advanced, eras that preceded us. Noach’s grand technology could not save the world from the ravages of evil that brought upon humankind the great flood described in this week’s parsha.

Avraham’s grand values and holy behavior almost saved the seat of world evil, Sodom. The world is Noach’s world but its survival is dependent upon the survival and eventual triumph of Avraham’s children, ideas and beliefs. © 2025 Rabbi B. Wein zt”l - 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And [Noach] said, “Praised be Hashem, the G-d of Shem... May the L-rd expand Yefes, and dwell in the tents of Shem...” (Beraishis 9:26-27) After Noach drank wine and became intoxicated, his son Cham found his father in a state of undress and mocked him to his brothers. At Shem’s urging, Yefes assisted Shem in taking a garment and covering their father, walking in backwards so as not to see him this way. It was in response to all these actions that Noach cursed Cham and bless the others.

It is interesting to note that when praising Shem, Noach begins by praising Hashem, using the name similar to that of his son Shem, which is also the one connoting mercy and compassion. When he blesses Yefes, Noach uses the name Elokim, which conveys the Midas Hadin, the stricter form of judgment.

It would seem that Shem somehow earned a greater blessing with his act, and, indeed, we are told that because of Shem’s deed, his children, the Jewish People, merited the mitzva of the garment of tzitzis. Perhaps that is why he deserved Divine mercy more than Yefes. However, there is a simpler way to

understand the change.

When Shem and Yefes heard what had happened, and how Noach was disgraced, it was Shem whose heart went out to his father, and wished to end his shame. Yefes seemed unmoved by the news. However, when Shem suggested that the two of them cover their father, Yefes determined it to be an appropriate course of action, and joined in. The blessings Noach gave reflected the dedication each son put in.

Shem was compassionate and loving, and sought to end Noach’s embarrassment, emulating the attributes of Hashem. That is also why Noach called Hashem, “the G-d of Shem,” because it indicates Shem’s motives in being good, which were to be similar to his Creator and seek to feed the hungry, and yes, clothe the naked.

Yefes, on the other hand, was less merciful. It seemed logical to him that they cover Noach, perhaps out of respect for their father, or maybe out of appreciation for the merit that saved their lives. However, his response was more measured and calculated, reflecting Hashem’s mida of justice. These two approaches echo our service of Hashem.

The commentaries explain the second verse to mean that though Hashem would “expand Yefes,” He would dwell in the tents of Shem. This is an allusion to Koresh (Cyrus) who built the Second Temple, but Hashem’s countenance only rested in the First Bais HaMikdash, built by Shlomo HaMelech, a descendant of Shem.

Perhaps, though, we can suggest that Noach blessed Yefes that HE dwell in the tents of Shem, meaning that Yefes’s children be positively influenced by Shem’s descendants. Then they might truly expand and be inspired to go from serving Hashem with fear, to serving Him with love.

The Chofetz Chaim was called to testify in a secular court. As an introduction, the lawyer wanted to impress upon the judge what a sterling reputation the Chofetz Chaim had.

“Your honor,” he said, “They say that one day a guest stole some silver cutlery from this man. The thief ran from the house and the Chofetz Chaim ran after him shouting, “Hefker! Hefker! – These things are ownerless!” He did this so the man would not be considered a thief in the eyes of Jewish law.”

The judge sneered at the lawyer and said, “Come on, do you really believe this story?” The lawyer replied, “Your honor, I don’t know whether it’s true or not, but I know one thing: They don’t say such stories about you or me.” © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Animals on the Ark

We are all familiar with the story of Noach and the Ark. Noach was warned by Hashem that He

would destroy the world by a flood. Noach was told to build a large boat (Ark) and bring two of each animal onto the Ark for preservation of the species. The problem with this narrative is that there are several statements that contradict the number two and how those animals came to the Ark.

Our first encounter with the numbers of animals occurs in Chapter 6 (19-20): "And from all that lives of all flesh, two of each shall you bring into the Ark to keep alive with you they shall be male and female. From each bird according to its kind, and from each animal according to its kind, and from each thing that creeps on the ground according to its kind, two of each shall come to you to keep alive." In this first listing of the animals who were to be brought onto the Ark, there would be only one male and one female of each species of animal, bird, and creeping animal (bugs and insects).

Four sentences later in Chapter 7 (2-3), we find a different set of instructions concerning which animal should be brought: "Of every pure animal take unto you seven by seven, a male with its mate, and of the animal that is not pure, two, a male with its mate; of the birds of the heavens also, seven by seven, male and female, to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth."

The third statement of Noach's complying with the commandment of Hashem is found in Chapter 7 (8-9): "Of the pure animal, of the animal that is not pure, of the birds, and of each thing that creeps on the ground, two by two they came to Noach into the Ark, male and female, as Elokim had commanded Noach." Obviously, it is necessary to consult the commentaries to comprehend these apparent discrepancies.

Rashi handles the discrepancy between two and seven (pairs) of animals by saying that the Torah means to say, "there were no less than two, one male and one female." Though that does not really answer the problem, it does allow for the greater number (seven) to be listed and then the number two repeated after the seven. Ibn Ezra explains that a male and female of each species were chosen to repopulate the world with their species. These animals came freely, as they were not endangered by the other animals who had the same task.

The Ramban explains that two of each species, male and female, came by themselves to the Ark. Hashem chose these two animals from each species because only He could know which of each species had not become impure by relations with other species or which may have been used to worship a false god. When the Torah uses the word "tavi, you will bring," when referring to these animals, the implication is that there was no effort on Noach's part to find and secure them. His task was only to "cause them to enter, bring them" once they arrived at the Ark. Six of the seven pairs of "pure" animals were different; the first pair coming to the Ark with no effort, but the last six pair,

"taken by Noach." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin says that Noach was required to "take" all seven pairs of "pure" animals because he would have to place a recognizable sign on the one pair that would be for procreation alone. The instruction to Noach there was "you shall take for yourself." "Take" is an action form which involves Noach's effort to accomplish. The Ramban explains that Hashem did not wish the animals who were to be slaughtered to walk willingly to their slaughter.

HaRav Sorotzkin points out that the phrase "tikach l'cha, take unto you" can be translated "take for you." HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Noach should take the pure animals for any of his needs, not only for sacrifices, but also for consumption. Even though the permission to consume meat was given later to Noach, this was a prior hint of that permission. Others wish to say that the permission for the consumption of meat was hidden from Noach until Hashem had the opportunity to instruct Noach on not eating the blood from the animal, spilling that blood on the ground, and not taking a piece from a living animal.

There is a difficulty with the previous explanations in the category of birds. Birds are also mentioned in the first paragraph as two yet in the second paragraph as seven, even though there is no mention of pure and impure. The Ramban explains that only the "pure" birds were seven male and seven female which Noach gathered, while the "impure" birds came to the Ark one male and one female.

There is still another question which is brought concerning these animals. HaRav Sorotzkin asks why the Torah stresses seven males and seven females of the animals. With one male and one female of the "impure" animals, we can understand that the species needed one of each for procreation. Without that minimum number, the species would become extinct. With the seven males and seven females of the "pure" animals, was it necessary to have seven males when we see in other places within the Torah that one male animal could impregnate several females, thus guaranteeing the continuation of the species and providing animals for sacrifice. HaRav Sorotzkin points out that these animals were to be brought as an olah-offering, which was a male. Since only four olah-offerings were brought, there would still be males left for the seven females.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that until this time (the tenth generation of Man) "animal flesh was not an object of human consumption, and the difference between 'pure' and 'impure' animals was only made later on by the laws given on Sinai." HaRav Hirsch posits that this distinction was already present, since even the Noachite sacrifices could only be made from "pure" animals. "It is only that which is fit for all men to offer, that (became that which) Jews are allowed to eat." HaRav Hirsch goes on to say that the

meat of kosher animals, animals which are pure, "allow rays of light to pass through, offers no resistance to them." He explains that "pure" man is receptive and allows Hashem's rays to penetrate him. HaRav Hirsch also uses this understanding to dispel the theories by some that the laws of kosher animals were for health reasons rather than for a spiritual reason.

Though Hashem destroyed the world, He did not destroy His creation. He took what was "pure" and started over. We can also create ourselves anew from the "pure" within us. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Reflections

What were the builders of the Tower of Babel thinking? How could people presumably aware of Hashem think they could somehow stand in opposition to Him?

The "Mei Marom" (R' Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zt"l) offers a tantalizing thought: The place on earth called Babel possessed a deep spiritual nature of "overcoming the Divine" - which eventually expressed itself properly in the cases recorded in the Gemara (e.g. Bava Metzia 59b, Rosh Hashana 57b) where a beis din "overruled" Hashem - that is to say, asserted the ability He gave them to do so.

Perhaps, Rav Charlop suggests, it was that spiritual reality of the place that inchoately resonated with its inhabitants, leading them to feel that, indeed, in their own way, they had the "ability" to challenge Hashem. © 2025 Rabbi A. Shafraan

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

I can't recall if I noticed this last year or the year before. I also don't remember if I heard it from anyone else, though I find it very hard to believe that no one else would have noticed it until now. So, I'll mention it anyhow.

One of the prayers we had been saying (thank God we don't have to anymore) for the hostages was something that we already say regularly as part of Monday and Thursday Shacharis: "[As for] our brothers, the entire House of Israel who [still] remain in distress uvashivia -- and captivity, whether on sea or on land, may God have compassion on them, and bring them from distress to relief, from darkness to light, from servitude to redemption, at this moment, speedily, very soon; and let us say Amen."

Similarly, the word for "captive" also appears in the Torah here: "The Canaanite king of Arad...waged war against the Jewish People and took from a shevi -- captive" (Bamidbar 21:1). Until recently, that is the word we have used to refer to Jews taken captive, which was once a far too common thing.

But that is not the word you will find used by the media or anyone since October 7, 2023, after Hamas

invaded Israel and brutally took captives. The word used was chatufim from the word (lichtoph), which means to grab something suddenly and forcefully, also correct.

This is the interesting part. In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us why God decided to destroy mankind, save Noach, his family, and some of the animals: "the land was filled with chamas -- theft" (Bereishis 6:11). Yes, they were doing all the other things mankind does wrong and which angers God, even the worst of the worst. But, as the commentators point out, stealing from one another seemed to seal the deal on destruction.

We're told a similar thing at the end of Parashas Ki Seitzei. First, we were commanded to make sure our weights and balances are just so that we do not cheat anyone. Then, we are commanded to wipe out all memory of Amalek, raising the question, what's the connection between the two?

It is explained that the Torah is indicating what leads to Amalek, our most formidable enemy and national nemesis: stealing. The cardinal sins are cardinal sins, but there is something specific about stealing that represents the breakdown of society and great spiritual vulnerability.

Targum Onkeles's translation of chamas? Chatufim.

To be clear, there are levels of stealing. The most obvious level is taking someone else's property without permission, even if you intend to later return it. They can even see you do it, but if they do not agree to your possession of their property, it is stealing.

But halachah also talks about how gambling wins can also be a form of stealing. People do not gamble to give up their money, but hoping to win. They are only "forced" to part with their hard-earned cash by the rules of the game. It may be legal by human standards but not necessarily by Heavenly ones.

Gouging can also be a form of stealing by God's standard. Just because we let the marketplace set the price of products does not mean God agrees with that. The marketplace is human-made, human-run, and greed-driven. Does that sound like a just system to decide what is good and bad for society?

I once heard the recording of a well-respected rabbi speaking to, rather, yelling at a conference room of frum lawyers. He was shocked at how many widows and orphans had to forgo proper representation in the courts because they could not afford the fees. It was as if, he cried out, secular standards had replaced Torah values.

One thing is for certain, and that is that we do not appreciate how destructive stealing is to God's world, or how many forms of stealing there are according to Torah. Making money on money is normal and logical, but not necessarily acceptable in Heaven, and when you learn the laws of ribbis (interest), it is

surprising to see how some of the most seemingly fair transactions fall into the category of the Torah prohibition.

Of course, I am not stating that this was the basis for what happened two years ago and just came to an end (at least for the remaining living captives) this Hoshanah Rabbah. It would take a prophet in touch with God to say that with credibility.

But, we also don't believe in coincidence on any level, and Parashas Noach came right after we finally came to terms with what had just occurred that Simchas Torah. The most I can say with any certainty is that it is "interesting." Oh, and, would it hurt to give some thought to how we do business and charge what we do, especially for things people need but might not be able to afford?

At the very least, we'll have less to confess next Yom Kippur, b"H. At the very best, we can avoid such crises in the future. © 2025 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

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Hot Springs of Tiberias

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

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

Some say that if a non-Jew uses *Chamei Teverya* to cook food, it may still be eaten by a Jew. Since the heat source is not fire, the food is not considered to have been cooked by the non-Jew (and thus it is not forbidden on the grounds of *bishul akum*). Nevertheless, all agree that if non-kosher food is cooked in a pot using *Chamei Teverya* as the heat source, both the pot and the food become forbidden. Does this mean that the people of Teverya can save on their electric bills by using *Chamei Teverya* to *kasher* their kitchen items before Pesach? Not necessarily. Some maintain that if a pot absorbed the taste of prohibited food while on the fire, it can be rid of it only

by fire, following the principle of "*Kebol'o kach polto*" ("An item 'spits out' absorbed food in the same way that it absorbed it"). If so, *Chamei Teverya* would not count for *kashering* purposes.

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

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah projects the glorious future of the Jewish people and describes the splendor of Jerusalem in breathtaking dimensions. In the midst of this indescribable vision the prophet Yeshaya draws a striking comparison between our present exile and the flood in the time of Noach. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For a brief moment of anger I concealed My countenance from you but with everlasting kindness I will show My compassion. As with the waters of Noach about which I swore that they will never again flood the world so have I sworn never again to become angry with Israel." (54: 8,9) The prophet assures the Jewish people that their painful years of exile will soon draw to a close never to be repeated. Drawing attention to the flood, he guarantees that, "As the world has never experienced a second flood so will the Jewish people never experience another exile." This peculiar equation between the flood and the Jewish people's exile suggests a strong association between the two. It appears that Hashem's unconditional guarantee to withhold a flood from this world serves as sound evidence to the eternal redemption of the Jewish people.

In order to appreciate this association, let us analyze Noach's role during the flood and Hashem's response to it. The Torah tells us in the beginning of our Sidra that the flood was sent because humanity turned totally inwards. The Torah states, "And the land was corrupt before Hashem and the land was full of robbery." (*Breishis* 6:11) All of mankind became focused on themselves satisfying all of their personal pursuits without taking anyone else's privileges and rights into consideration. They regarded everyone and their possessions permissible to themselves in order to satisfy their personal interests and desires. Humanity was literally destroying itself with every person concerned only for himself, showing no care or respect for anyone else. During the months of the flood it became Noach's sole responsibility to restore morality

to the world. The prevalent principles and policies in the Ark, Noah's world, had to be kindness and compassion. Every moment spent there had to be filled with caring and sharing. Hashem therefore charged Noah with the overwhelming responsibility of providing and tending to the needs of every living being in the Ark. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108B see Maharsha ad loc.) relates a conversation between Noah's son, Shem, and Eliezer wherein Shem stated that he never formally went to sleep throughout the twelve months he was in the Ark. Noah's family was totally preoccupied with their magnanimous chore of continuously following the varied feeding schedules of each living being. In this way, the family was totally involved in acts of kindness, providing for others every moment of their stay. This total reversal of priorities, placing their entire focus on the needs of others reestablished the world. In fact, our Chazal in the Midrash (Breishis Rabba 33:4) understand this to be the single merit through which the flood waters ended and Noah's family was permitted to leave the Ark and reenter the world.

Upon reentry, Noah immediately approached Hashem through sacrificial offerings and pleaded with Hashem never to repeat the devastating flood waters. In this week's haftorah we discover that Hashem responded with an oath that a flood of those dimensions would never reoccur. Apparently, Noah's total dedication to kindness bore everlasting fruits and in response to Noah's kindness Hashem promised to shower His boundless kindness on the world. The Malbim (see commentary on Yeshaya 54:10) reflects that the nature of kindness distinguishes itself in regards to the recipient's worthiness. Unlike compassion and mercy which are governed by and fashioned according to the worthiness of the individual in need, kindness knows no bounds. In essence, one need not be worthy in order to qualify for Hashem's kindness. In view of this, the Malbim explains that a pledge of Hashem's kindness is, by definition, an eternal commitment. Throughout the era of the flood Noah totally preoccupied himself with kindness and, in response, Hashem promised that throughout the era of this world He will preoccupy Himself with the world's kindness. This kindness translated into the unconditional guarantee that regardless how undeserving the world becomes it will never experience total destruction.

In view of this, Yeshaya draws our attention to this guarantee and states in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may jar and the hills may shift but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never falter." (54:10) As we have seen regarding Noah's kindness, Hashem promises to respond to our kindness with a similar unconditional guarantee. This kindness means that Hashem will never respond to our shortcoming with expressions of anger. Irrespective of our behavior, never again will the

Jewish people experience exile and other similar manifestations of Hashem's wrath. Once the Jewish people return to Eretz Yisroel, never again will Hashem remove His sacred presence from their midst. Hashem's kindness is eternal and after the Jewish people will receive His promise of kindness, it will be an unconditional and everlasting one.

This insight reveals to us the hidden message of Chazal and profoundly reflects upon the affluence of our generation. Chazal (see Rashi, Breishis 12:2) inform us of the character of the generation preceding Mashiach. They explain Hashem's introductory Bracha to Avrohom Avinu stated in the beginning of Lech Lecha in the following manner. There will be certain generations wherein Hashem's influence will be realized through our acts of kindness, others through our acts of devotion and sacrifice and others through our commitment to Torah and truth. But in the era which precedes Mashiach the prevalent virtue will be kindness. (based on the reflections of HoRav HaGaon Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l) This particular era distinguishes itself by being the launching pad for the era of Mashiach. This preceding era and its merits must secure the coming of Mashiach and all associated blessings. Amongst the blessings of Mashiach's times is Hashem's promise to shower us with His everlasting kindness, guaranteeing our eternal stay in Eretz Yisroel. But this commitment of everlasting kindness will only come in response to our selfless and personal commitment to unconditional kindness. This explains why never before has the opportunity of kindness availed itself to the Jewish people in such extraordinary proportions as in our days. Yes, with our generation accepting its responsibility and displaying of loving kindness we will deserve Hashem's unconditional response of His everlasting kindness. Yeshaya therefore points us to the flood and assures us that, as Hashem responded to Noah's kindness with His unconditional guarantee we should realize wholeheartedly that Hashem will also respond to our kindness with that same unconditional guarantee and shower His blessing upon His people for eternity.

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