

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

"A window you shall make for the ark..." (6:16)

As any real estate agent will tell you, the three fundamentals of real estate are: Location, location, location.

One of the things you can't change about a property is the view. A room with a view is a precious jewel.

When G-d instructed Noach to build the ark, He included specific instructions to include a *tzohar*. *Tzohar* has two possible meanings. It can mean either a "precious stone" or a "window." A precious stone might fill the ark with a beautiful light

as the sun's rays were refracted, bathing the inside of the ark with a multicolored glow. A precious stone is to let the light in. A window, on the other hand, is for looking out. But what were they supposed to look out at? An empty waterscape of gray in every direction?

G-d wanted Noach to have a window on the world to see the world's destruction and have a feeling of pity.

In life, it's easy to think if I'm okay — the world's okay. Life's biggest jewel is to look out of our own arks and take up the yoke and the heartaches of others.

Sources:

• Rashi, Rabbi Rafael Stephansky

PARSHA OVERVIEW

It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants except for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the earth. Hashem instructs Noach to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noach sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. Hashem tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and disig-

nates the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world's climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach's sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach's three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Bavel, which results in Hashem fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

HAFTARAH

ISAIAH 54:1-10

In this week's *Parsha* G-d promises never to bring another flood to destroy the world; so, too, the *haftara* carries G-d's promise never to exile the Jewish People after the redemption from the current Exile of Edom.

The *Parsha* depicts the terrible flood which destroys the earth and its myriad creatures. It looks like the end, but it is, in reality, the beginning. Out of the ashes of a degenerate world sprouts the seed of Noach.

Similarly, the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdash* and the Jewish People's dispersal were like a "flood" which seemed a total disaster.

The Prophet Isaiah tells that, rather than the ruin of the nation, this was its preservation, and like a mother left lonely and grieving, Zion will be comforted when the exile has achieved its appointed task of purification, and her children return to her.

Besides being a mitzvah, judging favorably is simply a smart thing to do. I mean, how many times does it seem like the other guy is out of line, when really you're the one who's...

OUT OF ORDER

I was expecting an important business phone call one morning when I discovered that the phone lines in our house were dead. New in the area and not really knowing any of our neighbors, I drove a mile up the road to a pay phone, called the phone company repair service and reported the phone out of order. The technician who answered told me to hold on for a minute while he checked the line signal he got. He came back and said, "You have a phone off the hook." Much relieved, I hurried home, checked all the phones in the house and didn't find anything wrong. So back up the road I went to the pay phone, talked to the same technician, told him there was no phone off the hook, and was again told in stronger terms, "You do have a phone off the hook."

Another trip home, another check of all the phones, once again up the road and this time I fairly screamed at the technician that all the phones were O.K. and I was expecting an important call and needed my phone in working condition immediately. He told me that he would put in a repair order but, one, nobody could get there until Monday, and, two, the only thing wrong was a phone off the hook. I was livid but what could I do.

On arriving home, I asked my wife if she had used the phone at all that day and she replied that the only use had been to talk to my son who said he just wouldn't be able to come to the house as planned the following week for holiday dinner. When I asked what happened then, my wife rather sheepishly replied that she was so mad she said goodbye and slammed the phone down. I thought about this for a moment, picked up the phone she used, listened to the dead line, hit the side of the phone hard with my fist and — lo and behold — I got a dial tone. Proudly, I hung up the receiver and immediately the phone rang. I picked it up and when he spoke I recognized the voice. It was the repair technician and all he said was, "I told you there was a phone off the hook." And he hung up.

• CB, Walnut Creek, California <Roseclyde@home.com>

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

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Re: G-d is My Dentist (Ohrnet Bereishet):

I must tell you that I was immensely touched by your answer to "Name@Withheld in Brooklyn" concerning his question about all G-d's actions being for the good. The response you gave using the example of a child going to a dentist was inspirational and illuminating. I want to thank you for your dedication and for sharing your knowledge with us. I pray that G-d keeps you safe and out of harm's way.

• Nossan Campos <LN281@aol.com>

Re: Justice

I am a professor of criminal justice at a state university in Missouri. I have been a detective and have taught criminal investi-

gation for a number of years. I was very impressed with the response that was given in the "Ask the Rabbi", issue #170, December 1997. This concerned the detective who was worried about using interrogation techniques that involved building up the trust of a suspect in order to get a confession. The response mirrors what I have been teaching students for the last 20 years. I had never thought about examining these techniques from a Scriptural context. Excellent work.

• Roger L. Pennel, Ph.D.
Professor,

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LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

SHEMER

This Biblical city was built by Omri, King of Israel, on Mount Shomron which he purchased from Shemer and named after him (*Melachim I 16:24*). Although Omri "did evil in the eyes of Hashem," our Sages point out that



his good deed in adding a city to Eretz Yisrael gained for him the distinction of being the first of the rulers of the Kingdom of Israel to be succeeded to the throne by both his son and grandson (*Sanhedrin 72b*).

MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF

If one hears another Jew make a vow to be a *nazir* in the event that a son is born to him and he declares “Me too,” there is a question raised as to his intention. On the one hand we can interpret his statement as a vow that he too will be a *nazir* if a son is born to himself. Alternatively, there is the possibility that what he really meant was that he too will be a *nazir* if a son is born to his friend, and the “me too” was a declaration that we will love that son as much as his father does and therefore will express his gratitude to Heaven in the same manner by assuming *nezirut*.

This unresolved question is presented in our *gemara* by a sage names Ben Rachumi whose name appears nowhere else in the Talmud. An interesting observation is made by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chayot about sages who made such solo appearances. These sages became so identified with their single statement that they were called by a name referring to it.

One example is Rabbi Yitzchak Migdalah who explains the *mishna* (*Mesechta Bava Metzia 25a*) which rules that if one finds three coins placed one upon the other he must assume that they did not fall from their owner in such fashion and were abandoned, but rather were placed there and forgotten, a situation requiring the finder to announce his find. This is only true, says this sage, if the coins are found in the pyramid pattern of a tower, with each coin lying on one broader than itself. Since he used the model of a “*migdal*,” Hebrew for tower, to make his point, he was subsequently referred to as Rabbi Yitzchak *Migdalah*.

Another example is Rabbi Zuhamoi (*Mesechta Berachot 53b*), who made a solo statement that one whose hands are greasy from eating is ineligible to say the *birkat hamazon* after a meal. Since he used the term “*mezuham*,” Hebrew for greasy, he was thereafter known as Rabbi *Zuhamoi*.

In the same manner, our *gemara*’s question regarding a vow for *nezirut* which might be interpreted as “love for the son,” the sage who presented this question was called Ben Rachumi which means a “son who is loved.”

• *Nazir 13a*

THE SIN OF SELF-DENIAL

Self-denial can sometimes be spiritually counterproductive. Rabbi Elazar Hakapar derives this from the fact that the Torah refers to the *nazir* as a “sinner.” The only sin we can find in regard to the *nazir* is the fact that he denied himself the pleasure of wine. If one who abstains from wine alone is called a sinner, he concludes, how much

more so is one who denies himself everything and indulges in fasting considered a sinner!

The only problem with this sage’s deduction is that the Torah calls a *nazir* a sinner only in the case where he defiled himself through contact with the dead and must bring sacrifices of atonement and start his *nezirut* period from the beginning. There is no mention of sin in the Torah regarding the *nazir* who successfully completes his *nezirut* period without becoming impure.

Rabbi Elazar Hakapar responds to this challenge by pointing out that every *nazir* is really a sinner because of his self-denial but the Torah explicitly applied this appellation to the *nazir* who became impure because he magnified his sin.

This statement seems to run counter to a previous *gemara* (*Nazir 3a*). The first *mishna* in our *Mesechta* teaches us that one who declares “I shall beautify myself” is considered as having taken a vow of *nezirut*. The Sage Shmuel explains that since he was holding on to his hair when he made this declaration it is understood that his intention was to beautify himself before Hashem through the *nezirut mitzvah* of abstaining from cutting his hair. How can *nezirut* be considered beautiful before Hashem, asks the *gemara*, if the *nazir* is called a sinner? The answer given is that Rabbi Elazar Hakapar was referring only to a *nazir* who became impure and not to a regular *nazir*.

Tosefot (*Nazir 2b and Bava Kama 91b*) resolves this contradiction as follows: Every *nazir* is called a sinner because of his self-denial. There is, however, a positive aspect of *nezirut* when it is utilized to control illicit passion. *Nezirut* can therefore be considered beautiful before Hashem because the positive element outweighs the negative one. A parallel to this is the case of one who is commanded to fast on Shabbat because of a bad dream. Even though fasting on Shabbat is wrong, the positive aspect of counteracting the evil portent of the dream outweighs this and he must go ahead with it, and later he must atone for his sin of fasting on Shabbat by fasting on another day in the week. When it comes to the *nazir* who becomes impure, the negative aspect is dominant because he magnified his sin and the Torah therefore calls him a sinner.

There are several explanations in the commentaries of what is meant by magnifying his sin. One is that by having to start all over again he has added days to his period of self-denial. Another is that in addition to self-denial he has violated, even if only through negligence, the Torah ban on a *nazir* coming into contact with the dead. A third approach is that because he has to start all over again he may have regrets that he ever took upon himself such a vow and thus lose credit for the positive element in *nezirut*.

• *Nazir 14a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noah to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noah was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noah, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noah curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noah building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noah would answer, “Hashem is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it!” Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven amot.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it's better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noah's disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noah from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noah cursed Ham's fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
9. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

In Hebrew, “ark” and “word” are synonymous. Furthermore, the ark's dimensions were 30 x 300 x 50. These numbers correspond to the Hebrew letters “*lamed shin nun*” which spell “*lashon*” — “tongue.” The true “ark” which saved Noah and family were the *words* of prayer they uttered with their *tongues*.

IN DEFENSE OF ISRAEL

From: Joel Davidson in New Jersey
<joeld143@hotmail.com>

Dear Rabbi,

One is allowed to harm or even kill an attacker in self-defense if necessary. However, isn't it also true that under no circumstances may one harm an innocent to protect himself (for example, if a man has a gun to your head and tells you to kill an innocent by-stander, you must allow yourself to be killed rather than kill the innocent)? This being the case, it seems problematic to engage in bombing raids and other military means, no matter how justified by self-defense, when there is a significant chance of harming innocents. I am referring to bombings where civilians may be harmed when the IDF goes after Hizbollah or other terrorists. I would appreciate any insight you could offer. Shalom.

Dear Joel,

Unfortunately, there are groups and nations who base their fighters and military equipment in civilian areas. This deters attacks from their enemies, and allows them to gain world-wide sympathy if a civilian does get hurt, especially a woman or child.

We see this today. Before West Bank Arabs shoot their automatic weapons at us, they send children and teenagers up ahead to stone us and to throw fire-bombs. The sympathy they gain if a child dies is worth more to them than the life of the child.

Similarly, the Arabs are using civilian homes as bases to fire their rifles at us. As of this writing, this is being done to attack places like Psagot and Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood.

Israeli policy has always been to warn civilians prior to a strike. If Israel shells terrorists hiding in a residential area, warnings are delivered first by loud speaker, leaflets, radio, and by alerting the town authorities and giving them time to warn the residents so the residents may evacuate.

If there are civilians who, after the warning, choose to stay, then they knowing become obstacles to our ability, and our right, to defend ourselves. In that sense they can be considered accomplices.

A parting thought: One of my teachers in Yeshiva told me that, although Golda Meir may not have been a particularly religious lady, she said one thing which rings particularly true of Torah ideology: She said: "We may be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our children; but we can not forgive them for making us kill their children."

HEAVENLY HUMOR

From: Coby's Daddy in Jerusalem
<Email@Withheld>

Dear Rabbi,

This question is from my 4-year old son, Coby, from the Old City of Jerusalem: "What makes G-d laugh?"

Dear Coby's Daddy,

Your four year old son is asking a very deep question! And, of course, the answer to him is that G-d laughs at stuff that's really funny.

As the old Yiddish rhyme goes: "*Ah mentch tracht, und Gut lacht.*" This means, "Man plans, and G-d laughs."

More than just a stitch of folk wisdom, this idea is well-based in classical sources. "The One who dwells in the Heavens laughs," wrote David, King of Israel, regarding the Divine take on those who try to wipe out the Jewish People (*Psalms 2*). "G-d snickers at them" (*Ibid.*).

The futility of anti-Semitic plans to wipe us out is — ultimately — funny. People make plans, but G-d "laughs" when He knows that these plans will never materialize.

Now, G-d's essence is beyond comprehension. We, the created, can't understand the Creator. Still, the Torah talks about G-d in ways we can relate to, such as "G-d's Hand," "G-d's mouth," even though G-d doesn't have a hand or mouth in the physical sense. So too, G-d does not laugh as we know it.

But you can't invent something if you don't know what it does. To invent the light bulb and gramophone, Thomas Edison needed to know what sight and sound were. Therefore, G-d, who created everything including our capacity for humor, certainly "knows" a good joke when He hears one.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

	RAMBAN	10:9	Nimrod	8:22	The Pre-Flood World
6:19	Miracle of the Ark	10:15	The Land of Canaan	9:6	The Crime of Murder
7:1	Preserving the World	11:32	The Death of Terach	9:9	The Conditions of the Covenant
8:11	The Olive Leaf				
9:12	The Rainbow		SFORNO	9:13	Meaning of the Rainbow
9:18	Ham and Canaan	8:21	The New World		