



Parshas Noach

For the week ending 4 Cheshvan 5759
23 - 24 October 1998

Overview

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man. 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 in which to escape the flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days, the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends forth 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 seven more days, Noach once again sends forth the dove, which this time, 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 gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating the meat of a living 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 Yafes, 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 Babel, 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.

Insights

A VEGETARIAN WORLD

“...G-d saw the earth, and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.” (6:12)

If you’re a vegetarian, you might be interested to know that at one time the whole world was vegetarian.

Until the Great Flood in the time of Noach, no one killed an animal to eat its flesh. It was only when G-d gave a “new deal” to the sons of Noach — the seven *mitzvos* of *Bnei Noach* — that Man was permitted to kill animals for their meat.

Why should this be? The answer to this question is intimately tied to the reasons for the flood itself: “G-d saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.”

What started as private immorality and idolatry had degenerated into public licentiousness. The people of Noach’s generation practiced bestiality.

Seeing this breach in the fundamental division between Man and the other species, G-d brought the flood.

When Noach emerged from the ark to reestablish civilization, G-d permitted eating meat to prevent a reoccurrence of the bestiality which occurred before the flood: By permitting the consumption of animal flesh, Man necessarily saw himself as different than, and separate from, the animals. Never again would Man see himself as just another animal.

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A VEGETARIAN WORLD II

If you don't like meat, or if you think it's unhealthy, you are perfectly entitled to abstain from it. Instead of chicken soup on Shabbat, you can feast on mango chutney.

However, Judaism and your vegetarianism come into conflict if your misgivings about eating meat are because you believe that you and the cow have equally important roles in Creation.

Everything in the universe is created to serve Mankind. All the myriad species and diversity of Nature are "scenery," elaborate stage props, so that we may play out our star role — to recognize the Creator. This is the reason for Creation, and we are responsible to use everything in the world to assist us to perfect our character and bring us close to G-d. For by doing this, we not only elevate ourselves, but the entire Creation as well.

In Nature's hierarchy, every creature and species has its role. The mineral world supports the vegetable world: By feeding from minerals, vegetation incorporates the minerals with the result that the mineral world is elevated to a higher level. Similarly, when animals eat grass they elevate the vegetable world to the animal world.

And likewise, when a human eats an animal, the animal also ascends Nature's ladder. When a chicken ends up on someone's Shabbos table, it becomes the means by which Man elevates the physical to the spiritual — which is the essence of the Shabbos experience.

So order another veggie-burger, but don't write off that poor cow from *someone else's* Shabbos table. One day, in another world, you might meet up with a very irate heifer!

OF MEN AND MICE

"Behold I am about to bring the flood waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which there is a breath of life under the heavens."
(6:17)

The prophet *Yeshayahu* (Isaiah) refers to the flood as the "*waters of Noach*," implying that Noach bears at least partial responsibility for the flood.

For, if Noach had taught his generation to know G-d by instructing them to emulate G-d's *midos* (character traits), they surely would have repented.

The Rambam (Maimonides) once had a dispute with a philosopher as to whether instinct or behavioral training governs the behavior of an animal. The philosopher held that an animal can be trained so completely that it can be made to do almost anything. To prove his point, he painstakingly trained a number of

cats to stand upright, balance trays on their paws and serve as waiters. He dressed them for the part in white shirts with little black ties, and conducted a banquet with the cats as the waiters. As these feline waiters were serving the soup, the Rambam, who had been invited to the banquet, released a mouse. The banquet room was turned to pandemonium as the cats, forgetting all their hours of training, let their trays crash to the ground, rushing about on all fours after the mouse.

Without training, a person's baser instincts and desires will drag him onto all fours. However, a human being is different from the animals because he can perfect his character so that it controls his baser instincts. One who has not yet worked on perfecting his character will, like the trained cat, be able to put on a show of discipline for a time, but only so long as no "mice" are released in his path.

Only after a person has anchored good character traits in himself will the Torah reside in him. Only the Torah can bring one's character to ultimate perfection, but where there is no foundation of proper *midos*, the acquisition of Torah is impossible.

WORLDVIEW

"Let Canaan be a slave to them" (9:25)

Why did *Canaan*, offspring of *Ham*, have to be a slave to the descendants of *both Shem* and *Yafes*?

The name *Yafes* connotes beauty and aesthetic appreciation. *Yafes* was the progenitor of *Yavan* — father of Greek civilization. Thus Greek civilization emphasizes beauty as an absolute value.

Ham means "hot." It implies wild unbridled animal energy.

The civilizing effects of aesthetics (*Yafes*) can raise us to dominate our physical desires (*Ham*) to a level where we can make the leap from the sensual to the aesthetic; from "*the world is what I can feel*" to "*the world is what I can think*."

Only then can we ascend to the level of "*the world is beyond what I can think*." That's the level of *Shem*.

That's why it was necessary for *Canaan* to be yoked to both *Yafes* and *Shem*. For without an "apprenticeship" under *Yafes*, our baser natures find it hard to make the great leap from the physical to the spiritual.

The Jewish People are descended from *Shem*. It is our purpose to proclaim not only that faith is not contradictory to intellect, but that Man can aspire to that which is beyond intellect. As Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch put it: "*An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to comprehend truth does not make it untrue*."

Sources:

Of Men And Mice - Rabbi Zev Leff in *Shiurei Binah*
WorldView - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch

Parshas Noach

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For the week ending 4 Cheshvan 5759, 23 - 24 October 1998

Haftorah: Isaiah 54:1-10

Just as in this week's Parsha, where G-d promises never to bring another flood to destroy the world, so too the Haftorah 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 at the decree of the Merciful G-d. 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 *Beis Hamikdash* and the dispersal of the Jewish People were like a "flood" which superficially seemed a total disaster.

The Prophet tells that rather than being the ruin of the nation, in reality 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.

MOVED TO NOT REMOVE

"...And My kindness shall not be removed from you..." (60:10)

The words "shall not be removed" appear twice in our tradition. Once here, and once in *Yehoshua 1:5* — "This book of the Torah shall not be removed from your mouth."

It is the merit of Torah study — it *not being removed* from our mouths — that gives us the merit that "My kindness shall not be removed from you."

JEWISH DIETETICS

"Come all who are thirsty...go to the water...get wine and milk." (55:1)

Just as water, wine and milk keep best in plain inexpensive containers, so Torah, which satisfies the thirst of all who learn it, stays with one who is humble.

The revealed part of Torah is like water: Just as the human body cannot exist without water, so the Jewish People cannot survive spiritually without the revealed Torah.

The secrets of the Torah are like wine: They must be imbibed with care and are not equally tolerated by all.

The *midrashim* of the Torah are like milk and honey: They are sweet and nourishing, instilling love and fear of G-d.

Tiferes Zion

LOVE OF

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

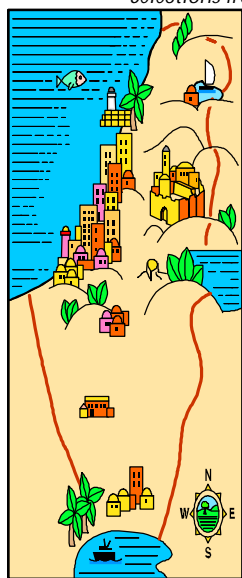
INDIRECT VANDALISM

The elimination of idol worship in *Eretz Yisrael* was a responsibility delegated to the Jewish People upon their entry into the Land. They were commanded to destroy the idols, smash their altars and wipe out any trace of their name.

This command is followed by the warning "You shall not do thus to Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim 12:4*). The simple reading of this passage is that we are warned not to do to the sacred items connected with Hashem that which we are instructed to do to those of the idol worshippers. Our Sages conclude from this that one who smashes even a stone from the Sanctuary or the altar, or one who erases even one letter of the Holy Name has violated this prohibition.

Rabbi Gamliel, however, sees another dimension in this warning: Of course Jews are not suspect of destroying their altars, says Rabbi Gamliel; rather, the Torah is warning us not to imitate the idolatrous ways of the heathens and cause our Sanctuary and altar to be destroyed as a result of our sins.

Sifri, Parshas Re'eh



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