

Parshat HaShavuah

נח
NOACH
 ד' חשוון תשע"ו
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S"Z Kriat Shema

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Sunset

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Motzei
 Shabbat

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Sponsored in memory of Lana (Leah) D. Goldberg

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WALKING WITH GOD MRS. AMY HOROWITZ

This week's parsha introduces us to a very familiar pasuk (Bereishit 6:9): "Noach ish tzadik, tamim haya bedorotav" – Noach was righteous, perfect, in his generation. Our sages raise the now-famous debate about whether this last word, "bedorotav", is a praise of Noach or a criticism. Was Noach righteous and perfect despite the people around him, or was Noach only righteous and perfect in comparison to the people around him?

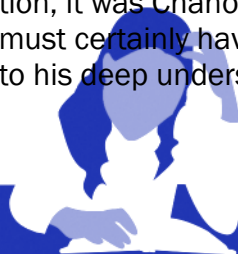
If Noach had lived in the same generation as, let's say, Avraham, would they have been chavrutas or would Noach have seemed like a boor in comparison?

Interestingly, the pasuk describing Noach doesn't stop at depicting Noach as merely righteous and perfect; there's another description of Noach in the pasuk that is often (usually) left out of the quote. The Torah tells us that: "et haElokim hithalech Noach" – in addition to being righteous and perfect (to whatever degree), Noach also "walked with God." What does it mean to walk with God, and how might that understanding help us resolve the debate about just how great Noach really was?

It's important to note that Noach is not the only individual the Torah describes as "walking with God." The first person to be described this way is Chanoch, Noach's great-grandfather (Bereishit 5:22), the second is Noach (in our pasuk), and the third is none other than Avraham (Bereishit 17:1). What do Chanoch, Noach, and Avraham have in common?

Rabbeinu Bachye, in his commentary on Parshat Noach, makes an interesting connection. Chanoch, he explains, lived during a time of idol worship, specifically the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. In his generation, it was Chanoch alone who didn't bow to convention, who dared to think that the sun, moon, and stars must certainly have been created by a greater power – God. In fact, Chanoch lived for exactly 365 years, a hint to his deep understanding of the natural world and God's role in creating and empowering it.

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Mrs. Horowitz continued

Sound familiar? It should! The midrash paints a picture of a young Avraham gazing up at the starry night sky and contemplating what lay beyond. In an era where idolatry was the only religion, Avraham, like Chanoch, was alone in his recognition that the world must have a sole Creator, a Designer, Ruler of the sun, moon, and stars. We know from other midrashim that Avraham's monotheistic revelation was unpopular; indeed, his beliefs almost cost him his life.

It seems that Noach was part of an elite and distinguished crew, a group of revolutionary thinkers who were unafraid to stand up for their beliefs. In an era when people had abandoned God (see commentary on *chamas*, the great sin of Noach's generation), Noach alone "walked with God", i.e., recognized God's unique role in the world.

Perhaps this helps resolve the debate about Noach's righteousness. Maybe the word "*bedorotav*" is not there to either limit or justify Noach's greatness, but simply to explain exactly what it was that made him so great. "*Bedorotav*", in a time when no one else recognized the unity and power of God, Noach's belief in and allegiance to God was revolutionary, earning him the unqualified status of a perfect tzadik.

STANDING TOGETHER

TY KAY ('18)

The story of Noach is well known. God becomes angry with the generation for their corruption and decides to wipe them out. He tells Noach to build a *teiva* to ensure his and his family's survival in the upcoming flood. However, while the story originally appears to make perfect sense, several questions arise, as it does not seem logical upon further examination.

The first question asked is, why did Hashem want to destroy this generation? The answer is that they were not simply bad people; rather, every act this generation committed was evil. They casually committed crimes such as theft, murder, and deception, and Hashem sought to destroy them due to the low level of morality they had attained.

When Hashem decided to obliterate that generation, why did He choose to do it through a flood and force Noach to spend 120 years building his *teiva*? The midrash states that Hashem specifically wanted Noach to take a long time to build his ark, and Hashem instructed Noach to perform this strange action on top of a mountain. This was done to arouse the people's curiosity, thus leading them to ask Noach questions regarding his actions. Noach would then tell those people of the danger they would face if they failed to repent.

However, Hashem's seemingly perfect plan for Noach became flawed when Noach failed to convince anyone to repent and ultimately be saved, in spite of the long 120 years allotted to him. Instead of using his *teiva* as a means to save others, Noach acted selfishly by only saving himself and his family.

Upon stepping out of his *teiva* after forty days and nights, Noach views the destruction surrounding him and realizes he could have lessened the damage and reduced the number of lives taken. When Noach recognizes his mistake in playing a passive role rather than the active role Hashem had intended for him, he gets drunk due to his shame.

The story of Noach teaches all of us that we cannot be bystanders. We must all seek to help others and remember that we are all connected. Whether as a school, as a community, or as a nation, we must all stand together as one. Hopefully in the future we will all try to help others at every given opportunity, learning from Noach's mistake and the sins committed by his generation.



LET THEM EAT MEAT

SARA MERKIN ('17)

In Parshat Bereishit, Hashem welcomes Adam to the new world that has just been created and permits him to eat almost all the fruit and plants that are there. Fast-forward a century and Hashem has just saved Noach and his family from a flood that wiped out an entire generation. Hashem now permits Noach to eat animals, as long as they are not alive. Why does Hashem reverse his position and allow humans to eat animals after the flood?

The Tosafot say that Adam had been eating meat already, but only once the animal had died on its own. Hashem was now allowing Noach to eat animals by killing them. Now the only limitation was not eating an animal while it was still alive.

Most other commentaries disagree with this opinion. The Rambam says that all the animals were actually supposed to be destroyed in the flood, but since Noach saved them, he was now given a higher dominance over the animals and was allowed to eat them.

From a secular perspective, John Calvin, Protestant leader, composed a commentary stating that the people were already killing animals to make use of their skin and fur for clothing and shelter. There came a point when it made sense to eat the animals, and not waste them.

Rav Kook shares another viewpoint; he explains that animals were originally created to serve humans under the condition that the people treat them well. This meant that humans could not eat or kill the animals. But as generations passed, the people dropped to such a low point in their moral and ethical values, that they became like animals. Hashem needed to create a distinct line between the two beings, and focus on returning the people, models of Hashem Himself, back to their original level of spirituality and morality. Therefore, Hashem allowed Noach and the generations after him to eat meat, in order to secure a strong divide between humans and animals.

Millennia later and we are still here, debating whether or not it is okay to eat animals. For reasons ranging from dominance to morality, we are allowed to eat meat today. Whether or not to be a vegetarian is a decision every person has to make for him or herself.

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

ILAN GRITZMAN ('16)

When reading the story of Noach and the תיבה, we must ask ourselves about the message of this week's parsha. The Torah says that at the time prior to the מבול, improper business ethics were a way of life, people were immoral, and people were on a path towards destruction. The righteous Noach is commanded by Hashem to build a תיבה to save himself, his family, and the animals. Why specifically a תיבה? Why spend all this time and effort building a תיבה? What message does the תיבה convey?

David HaMelech says "עולם חסד יבנה", that our world is built on חסד, kindness, which is one of the foundations of the earth. In order for a society to endure, חסד is necessary; without it, we are doomed for failure. We often do acts of kindness out of pity or mercy for someone else, but mercy and kindness are not exactly the same thing. What is the difference between the two?

Chazal explain that kindness is defined as an act of love and care, while mercy is simply doing something because you feel bad for someone else. If, for example, I cut my knee while playing basketball with my friend and he is sympathetic and offers to go easy on me, he is being merciful. However, if I never injured myself, but he is still kind to me, he displays a kindness that stems from love and true admiration.

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This differentiation helps understand the purpose of the תיבה. Kindness comes from people with an innate love for one another. If everyone shows kindness to one another, we can easily prevent a moral decline like that which corrupted the generation of the flood. When Hashem commanded Noach to build a תיבה, He was actually showing Noach what it means to be kind, so that Noach could teach kindness to the generation and it would spread. This message is as important today as it was thousands of years ago. We must remember that kindness is not only an act of selflessness, but it also defines us as individuals.

THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

There are only two times in the Torah when Hashem finds it necessary to completely obliterate a people. The first is the flood, found in this week's parsha, and the other is the destruction of Sodom and Amorah in Parshat Vayeira. In these two cases, God decided that there was no possibility of change for the people. This must be, because if there was even the smallest chance of correction, Hashem would not destroy the people. Why were these two generations so hopeless?

The people of the generation of the flood were highly immoral and corrupt. The midrash says that what sealed their fate was the sin of theft; specifically, they would steal things that were less than a *prutah* (the smallest coin), which was the amount that was legally considered theft, thereby technically avoiding the actual commission of a crime.

The people of Sodom and Amorah had a different method of technically avoiding crime. They did not even care to find loopholes in the law. Instead, they just changed the laws to accommodate their evils.

These two generations did something evil and then convinced themselves that their actions were not wrong. The generation of the flood did this by finding a loophole in the law, and the people of Sodom and Amorah completely changed the laws in order to commit their sinful deeds without consequence. Both generations believed that they had not violated any laws. In order to do *teshuvah*, one must first admit that he/she has done wrong, and because the people of these generations would not even acknowledge that they had sinned, there was not even a possibility of them correcting their wrongdoings.

These two examples are here to teach us an extremely important lesson: when we rationalize our actions, we can never correct them. We rationalize our actions everyday, whether we mean to or not. An example of this is thinking something is ok because everyone else is doing it or because no one will be hurt by the action. Instead of rationalizing, we need to strive to accept our wrongdoings, do *teshuvah*, and change for the better.

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