

United We Stand

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Parshas Noach

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The Parsha's Proofs

...an olive leaf it had plucked was in his mouth (8:9)

In this week's Parsha, G-d Destroys the world through a flood but saves the one perfectly righteous person, Noach, and his family, through an ark. However, after the flood is over, Noach still doesn't know exactly when it's safe to open the doors and leave- the world is still completely flooded and needs to dry out. The 60-foot tall boat had landed on a tall mountain, and he couldn't possibly see how wet the ground was from the tiny window at the top. Thus Noach resorted to sending birds, knowing that if they would return, the land was still uninhabitable, but if they did not come back, they had found an inhabitable place to nest. There was also a famous intermediate stage, when the bird at hand (a dove) had brought back an olive branch. This symbolized that the Earth was drying, but needed a little bit more time to be fully ready.

A critical read at this episode reveals a striking question: Why an olive branch? The Torah could have simply told us that the dove brought back a branch, and that would have conveyed the dryness of the land. Why specify that it came from an olive tree?

Rashi and Ramban both cite Bereishis Rabba (33:6), which explains that in reality this episode was coming to teach a lesson: It is better (that the dove) receive sustenance from this (olive tree), which is bitter, but comes from G-d's Hand, than to receive sustenance that is sweet from Noach's hand.

The lesson, as Ramban points out, is that if it is better for a bird to get sustenance from G-d than man, even if it is inferior, how much more so should man rely on G-d for sustenance as opposed to his fellow man.

But why *did* the dove teach Noach/us this message just as the flood is ending? What relevance does this have to anything that's going on?

The answer, perhaps, can be found by referring to a Ramban much earlier in the Parsha, which explains

why the generation of the Flood was destroyed (6:13). It is explained there that what sealed the fate of the generation was *Chamas*, robbery and fraud. In other words, the one sin that caused the devastating destruction of the flood was a lack of financial integrity. Why? Because unlike other sins, like immorality, dishonesty in finance is not only intrinsically a sin against G-d, it is a sin against one's fellow man.

As the world was about to begin again, there was one thing that was crucial to ensure above all else - that the reason for the destruction never apply again. Even though G-d promised not to destroy the world again, the worst thing would be if that promise actually became necessary. Thus G-d sent the dove to bring the all-important message to Noach- that it is always better to rely on G-d than man. This is the antithesis of financial corruption. When someone values the gaining of money, possessions, and worldly pleasures, then already on some level he is tempted by corruption. If dishonesty is the way to meet his goals, then maybe it can be justified, and the more extreme the desire, the greater the justifications will become. However, when one fully understands that everything they have comes from G-d, and that's all they want and not a penny more, then there's no reason for corruption to tempt them. They are completely uninterested in even a hint of ill-gotten gains. This was the dove's message- don't fall into the trap of the generation of the Flood. Understand that G-d is your only priority. This is the only way to fully maintain integrity and master both your relationship with G-d and your fellow man. Let us all strive to remember the olive branch and know that whatever lot comes our way, our only interest is what G-d grants to us. *Incidentally, my father recently published a great Sefer called Kanfei Yonah-literally translated as the wings of a dove. This book largely deals with many fascinating and often entertaining Beit-Din cases that he's dealt with, including many monetary ones that personify this theme of searching for the path of G-d above all else. It also has a great blue cover. It's available from the RIETS Press and can be purchased through YU or in many places where Seforim are sold.*

Deeper Meanings

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for HaRav Gedalia Dov Ben Perel, Yosef Shalom Ben Shira Miriam, Yisroel Altar Ben Chava Chana, Shlomo Moshe Ben Rachel, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos. [Have A Great Shabbos!](#)

There is an Aggadic description in the Gemara of a fantastic creature called the Re'em, which was hundreds of miles long and wide. Many commentators, noting the impossibility of a creature of such dimensions and that this description is brought by Rabba Bar Bar Chana, who is known for statements that are meant to be taken allegorically, many commentators do not take this description literally.

The Gemara in Zevachim 113b discusses the Flood from this week's Parsha. It asks the following question: If the Re'em was so big, how did it possibly fit into the ark? There is some back and forth about this issue- someone suggests that they stuck the head in, but this is quickly debunked due to its massive proportions. Someone suggests that they just stuck in the tip of his nose, but even this would have been too huge. Finally they settle on the tips of his horns.

Wait a second. Since when do we argue about how to fit an allegorical creature onto an ark?

There is only one answer I could find to this dilemma, and the answer is more puzzling than the question: The Ben Yehoyada explains that in reality, there was no difficulty in how the Re'em fit on the ark. They were only discussing it to sharpen their minds.

It is difficult to accept that the Amoraim were involving themselves with a false question, simply to sharpen their minds. That's like saying that Purim Torah has the value of actual Torah. The best answer I got was from my father, that sometimes the Rabbis are cited solving complex riddles, to show their brilliance. However, even if that is the explanation of the Gemara, it does not seem to align with the Ben Yehoyada.

For weeks I searched for a satisfying resolution to this dilemma. I did research. I asked around. I wondered and waited, hoping that some inspiring idea would emerge that would make for a great article (after all, you have to admit it's a very entertaining question). However, my efforts were all in vain.

Perhaps, however, there is a message even in my failure. There is a famous story where someone asked the Maggid of Dubno how he always had the perfect parable for any lesson he wanted to teach. The Maggid explained with a parable: Imagine a fence that a kid had been shooting at, and all the spots that had bullet holes had a circle drawn around them. A man asked in amazement how he always managed to shoot into the circle. The kid replied that whenever he shot a hole, he would draw a circle around it. That is what the Maggid did with his parables- he wouldn't wait for a story to fit his message, he would make a message to fit his stories (perhaps the Maggid was just being modest- I'm pretty sure he made up his own parables, so this shouldn't have been a problem).

The problem with my case was the opposite of the man's question on the Maggid- I was waiting for a message to fit my story. But the lesson is much broader than that. We all want different things- usually momentary pleasures, pride, honor, etc.-and at the same time we want to rise above these things and master ourselves. The problem is that rather than being proactive, molding our lives and our actions to fit with

our lofty goal of self-mastery, we wait for our life to naturally match our goal. However, this approach is doomed in ultimate failure. The only way to achieve success is to strive to seize the whole picture and patiently wait until we get it right.

Notes on Navi

In the 21st Perek of Shoftim, after the victory against the tribe of Binyamin, the people of Israel take an oath not to give their daughters to the survivors of the tribe in marriage. However, shortly thereafter they have extreme remorse, realizing how horrible it is that one of the tribes of Israel should be cut off from the rest. They devise a plan to procure wives for Binyamin without violating their oath- for one thing, they find that the people of Yavesh Gilead did not show up at the national gathering, an offense punishable by death. As they kill off the rest of the people, they keep alive the virgin daughters to marry to the tribe of Binyamin. This is insufficient, so they also devise a way where the remaining survivors can essentially kidnap wives for themselves (in this way the oath of *giving* daughters to them would not be violated). The book of Shoftim ends by lamenting the oft-repeated phrase- in those days there was no king in Israel, a man would do whatever seemed proper in his eyes.

This Perek may reflect the theme of brotherly love that personifies Israel- even when we must hurt each other, we maintain that love and compassion and really want what's best for everyone. However, the method of kidnapping wives doesn't really seem like an ideal solution. Perhaps that is what the closing statement is going on- that without a moral guide, the people resorted to kidnapping as "solutions" to "moral dilemmas". Indeed, the message that pervades this entire book is that, well-meaning or not, the only way to ensure moral success as a people is to rely on the guidance of qualified leaders. In this age where morality is more confusing than ever before, let's always remember that we don't know best and it behooves us to ask advice of a competent rav..

Mazel Tov! We finished Shoftim and, since we started with Shmuel, all of Neviim Rishonim! We will decide what to do next week, B"H (Neviim Achronim or start with Shmuel again.) Feel free to send in suggestions.

Goal of the week

Whenever you notice yourself feeling less than happy, smile and hold it until you feel good again.

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Our Mission is to bring the third Beis- Hamikdash by facilitating the only thing that will cause it: Unity. The Beis Hamikdash was destroyed due to Sinas-Chinam, blind hatred. Thus we must stop and reverse this deed, for nothing else can save us from Galut. Unity is key.