

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאוד

### PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

#### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Noach

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#### **SEEING THE GOOD**

##### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*"These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation." Noach walked with G-d..." (6:9)*

This opening pasuk of Parshas Noach describes Noach as having been righteous "בדורותיו" - "in his generation." Rashi famously cites the debate found in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 108a) as to whether this is meant as a compliment, or to qualify Noach's piety.

According to one view, this word accentuates Noach's righteousness - that despite living in a society characterized by sin and immorality, Noach acted righteously, and would have likely achieved even greater levels of piety had he lived among a more moral society.

The other view, however, interprets בדורותיו to mean that Noach was righteous only relative to the evil people among whom he lived; had he lived among good people, he would not have been considered righteous.

Some have noted a significant nuance in the way Rashi brings these two opinions. He writes יש מרבתינו דורשים - "There are some among our rabbis who interpret this as praise." Introducing the second opinion, Rashi writes, ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי - "And there are those who interpret it derogatorily." The first view is cited in the name of "our rabbis," whereas the second is attributed not to "our rabbis," but simply to unknown people who chose to explain the pasuk this way.

The explanation, perhaps, is that a true "rabbi" or rebbe does not "interpret" לגנאי when he can interpret לשבח. Rabbis and teachers are expected to view people positively, and judge them favorably to whatever extent possible. Those who interpret things לגנאי are not the rabbis, but the cynics and scoffers, those who look hypercritically, who look to find fault whenever they can.

The Torah way is to evaluate our fellow לשבח, to see all that is positive about other people, rather than judging them לגנאי, negatively and critically.

#### **SWEETENING JUDGEMENT**

##### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation." Noach walked with G-d..." (6:9)*

Noach (נח) symbolizes peace, as his name shares the same root as the word Nach (נח, at rest). Elokim, the Holy Name of G-d, refers to judgments. Noach represents the perfect tzaddik in every generation who continuously seeks to mitigate and sweeten the judgments of G-d. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 27a)

#### **DESCENDING TO ASCEND**

##### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man..." (6:9)*

The purpose of a tzaddik in this world is for him to come down to the level of the people, eat as they do, drink as they do, and partake of the material world, in order to raise the masses to a higher calling.

#### **STANDING "BEFORE" HASHEM**

##### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"Noach walked with G-d..." (6:9)*

The Name of G-d used in this verse is Elokim, which indicates the Divine attribute of judgment. Thus, this verse allegorically means that "Noach walked alongside G-d as He reveals Himself as Elokim," meaning that he did not have the capacity to transform G-d's attribute of judgment to mercy. [This is unlike the opinion of Reb Noson quoted previously.]

Regarding Avraham and Yitzchak, however, Yaakov says (Bereishis 48:15), "G-d [Elokim], before Whom my Avos walked," indicating that they led the attribute of judgment, since they had the power to transform it into mercy. It is in this context that our Avos are said to have "stood before G-d."

## GET INVOLVED

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*“Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) explains that a tzaddik is someone who, at times, may have had confrontations with people and was exonerated and acquitted of any wrongdoing. A *tamim* is someone who has avoided having any complaints registered against them altogether by not involving themselves with others.

It would stand to reason that perhaps one should strive to be a *tamim* over a tzaddik. One would certainly prefer to stick to his *“daled amos”* and avoid giving other people a reason to have issues with them. Yet, when the Torah introduces Noach, he is first described as a tzaddik and only after as a *tamim*. How are we to understand this?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that while it is certainly easier to withdraw from the world and live life as a *tamim*, Hashem would prefer that we live among others who we can positively influence and impact the world, even at the expense of possibly getting involved in disputes.

This is why the Torah first describes Noach as a tzaddik, which serves as a greater compliment given his willingness to become involved in the world, and only after as a *tamim* when it came to his own personal matters.

In life, it is our responsibility to develop the ability to be both a tzaddik and a *tamim*. There are times when we have to retreat into our private quarters in order to avoid being negatively influenced. However, we must also recognize how important it is to play an active role in our communities, even at the risk of losing out on some of our own personal growth, for the betterment of the world at large.

## BRINGING JOY TO HASHEM

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man...” (6:9)*

When a tzaddik performs a mitzvah, his principal pleasure is the fact that G-d Himself takes pleasure from his observance.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse “These are the generations of Noach”: Inasmuch as the word for “generations” [תולדות] can be interpreted to mean “the result,” and the name “Noach” [נח] to mean “rest,” “repose,” or “pleasure,” this phrase can be interpreted to mean that a tzaddik’s chief pleasure that results when he does G-d’s mitzvos is pleasure itself, specifically the pleasure that G-d derives from his performance. Understand this.

The verse is thus to be read: “That which gives birth to the pleasure [Noach] [of a tzaddik] is the pleasure [that his service gives G-d].”

## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

### Yid HaKadosh

*“These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man...” (6:9)*

Fathers strive to help their children become learned and pious Jews. In turn, their children train their own children to follow in their footsteps. However, when will the time come when the father will strive to be on a high level and not leave the task to his children? That is why it is stated: “These are the sons (or generations) of Noach. Noach was a righteous, wholehearted man” - Noach himself was what he wanted his sons to be.

## HUMBLE PERFECTION

### Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

*“Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 6) interprets the adjective *tamim*, “wholehearted,” to mean “perfect in his ways.” Rashi renders it as “modest and humble in spirit.” Why should wholeheartedness or “perfection” be associated with the virtue of humility?

Because the Sages say (Megillah 29) that “if a man is arrogant, there is a blemish in him.” Thus, if arrogance is regarded as a defect, humility would naturally imply perfection.

## KEEP STRIVING

### Reb Elimelech Lizensk

*“These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

The fact that Noach thought of himself as righteous made him a good man but of a lesser degree. The man who continues to labor in search of Hashem never stands still.

The Tzaddik seeks to purify that which necessitates change for all generations. Every change marks a different “generation” in his life. It is in this way that a man lives in many generations, as it is written of Noach “in his generation.”

(The Yid HaKadosh, interpreting the spirituality of Noach, said that there are three categories in the service of G-d:

1. In the highest category are those who are constantly involved with mitzvot and good deeds. They feel that what they are doing is necessary and they do not look for any reward.
2. There are those who are aware that they do not perform many mitzvot and do not do many good deeds. For these people there is hope that they will begin to perform more mitzvot and good deeds.
3. There are those who think of themselves as Tzaddikim and therefore feel no need for self-improvement. They will never reach great spiritual heights.)

## **BALANCING ACT**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*“Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

The opening pasuk of Parshas Noach describes Noach as a righteous man “in his generations.” Rashi brings a famous dispute among Chazal as to the implication of the word “בדורותיו” (“in his generation”). Some, Rashi writes, interpret this word as expressing praise for Noach, emphasizing that he was a צדיק despite living in a generation characterized by corruption and immorality. Others, however, interpret דורשין לגנאי that the Torah qualifies its description as Noach as a צדיק. It indicates that Noach was righteous only in relation to his wicked contemporaries; had he lived in a more righteous generation, he would not have been considered a צדיק.

Many have raised the question of why there were those among Chazal who understood the pasuk in a manner that was unfavorable to Noach. If the Torah speaks in glowing praise of Noach, using words such as צדיק and תמים, then why would these sages choose to interpret the word בדורותיו as expressing criticism of Noach?

The Rebbe of Apta, in Oheiv Yisrael, offers a novel explanation of Rashi’s comments. He writes that the phrase “יש דורשין לגנאי” - “There are those who interpret [the pasuk] unfavorably” - refers to Noach himself. He was the one who thought that he was righteous only in relation to his contemporaries, and would not be considered an outstanding צדיק in a different age. Noach did not pat himself on his shoulders, feeling proud and accomplished. When G-d complimented him, calling him “righteous,” Noach, in his great humility, reminded himself that he was not that great. He did not allow the compliments to get to his head.

Rav Simcha Bunim of Pshischa taught that a person must walk about with two different “notes” in his pockets. In one pocket, he should keep a note that says, בשבילי נברא העולם - “The world was created for me.” He should understand that he is important and consequential, that he has G-d-given abilities, and all his actions truly matter and have a significant impact. But in the other pocket, he should have a note that says, עפר ואפר אנוכי - “I am but earth and ashes.” He should understand that he’s nothing special, that he’s a flawed, frail human being just like everybody else. The challenge, Rav Bunim writes, is to know when to pull out each “note.” When we receive compliments and praise, we need to remind ourselves that עפר ואפר אנוכי, and ensure not to allow the admiration we receive to go to our heads, that we never forget our weaknesses and deficiencies. When we’re feeling down and unaccomplished, when we begin wondering whether we matter, whether we are important, we must remind ourselves that בשבילי נברא העולם, that G-d put us here for a reason, for a purpose, because He believes we have something immensely valuable to offer the world.

We need to know when to be דורשין לשבח and when to be דורשין לגנאי, when to remind ourselves of our great importance, and when to remind ourselves of our lowliness.

## **PRIMARY PRODUCTS**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“These are the sons [or generations] of Noach. Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

Parashas Noach begins by declaring, “These are the *toldos* [typically, *toldos* is used to denote children] of Noach,” and digresses to expressly point out that Noach was righteous and moral (6:9-10). Only in the following pasuk are Noach’s three sons named. Why does the Torah seem to interrupt its narrative to share this?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggests that character is a person’s primary “product.” In this case, *toldos* alludes not to Noach’s progeny but rather to his good deeds that would endure for eternity. Noach’s fortitude to remain righteous and walk with G-d despite the corrupt world around him is critical to producing offspring and serving as the example for the future of all humanity. As we begin the journey of the Torah, we are given the foundational ingredients for our development of character: introspection, faith, and inner strength.

## **JUDGING FAVORABLY**

### **Rabbi Ari Ciment**

*“Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

Yehoshua ben Perachia would say: “Make for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every man to the side of merit.” (Avos 1:6)

The simple meaning of this ethic implies that one should engage in three distinct parts of a mission: (a) go get yourself a rabbi, (b) acquire a friend, and (c) judge people favorably.

1. Is there a connection between these ideas?
2. Also, the wording here of “עשה לך רב” - Make for yourself a rabbi” is rather unusual. Shouldn’t it rather say, “Go get yourself a rabbi”?

The Torah says that Noach was a righteous man “in his generation.” Rashi says the following:

In his generations: Some of our Sages interpret it [the word בדרתיו] favorably: How much more so if he had lived in a generation of righteous people he would have been even more righteous! Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Avraham’s generation, he would not have been considered of any importance. (Sanhedrin 108a; Bereishis Rabbah 30:9; Midrash Tanchuma, Noach 5)



Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro once said: Why does Rashi say that “some of our Sages” interpret it favorably, and then say that “others” interpret it derogatorily, leaving out the word “sages” or “rabbis”? An answer may be because it is not becoming to be derogatory of others, especially of our forefathers. Rabbis or respected folk should, and usually will, find a way to find the good in people, and thus likely analyze Noach in a positive light, while “others” (i.e., not really “rabbi-like” in the sense that a rabbi would not be proud of having to say this) will find a way to deem Noach in a negative light. Bottom line, it is generally derogatory to be derogatory, and thus not the ideal purpose of a rav. To be clear, it was Sages who interpreted it to be a less than good thing about Noach, and of course rabbis need to criticize when there is a purpose or lesson. Nevertheless, the term “rabbi” is still not mentioned in relation to the derogatory view because harsh criticism is just an unfortunate albeit necessary by-product of being a rabbi, and not the ideal primary purpose.

Perhaps the Mishnah in Avos may be saying the same thing: Do you know how to truly make yourself into a rav? First you must find a friend and together judge people favorably! Each and every one of us has the potential of becoming a rav, or a respected person in some way, by adhering to the simple tenet of being friendly and judging people favorably. And so, in fact, these three seemingly disparate elements of getting a rabbi, finding a friend, and judging others favorably, represent one unifying concept.

Takeaway Message: Noach was righteous “in his generation.” The fact that Rashi states that “some rabbis” interpret “in his generation” favorably, and that “others” (i.e., not rabbis) interpret the same words negatively may indeed reflect a point that it is not ideal or “rabbi-like” to be disparaging of others. The best way we can each become “rabbi-like” (i.e., respectable people) may not be by knowing Shas inside and out, but rather by simply not being overly judgmental of others.

How can I become a rav? By judging others favorably along with the friends you acquire along the way. So was Noach righteous? “Others” may say not, but many “rabbis” will judge favorably.

## **THERE'S ALWAYS A CRITIC**

### **Premishlaner Rebbe**

*“Noach was a righteous and wholehearted man in his generation...” (6:9)*

Rashi comments that there are rabbis who interpret the words “in his generations” as praise of Noach, and there are those who interpret the words to the detriment of Noach.

Rashi is teaching us that no one is exempt from gossip - even the leader of a generation. All one can do is deal with the situation. There were those in Noach’s generation who spoke against Noach, even though the Torah is witness to the fact that he was “righteous in his generation.”

## **LEVELS OF DEVOTION**

### **Reb Elimelech Lizensk**

*“And Noach had begotten three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafes.” (6:10)*

Noach had three sons, three degrees of perfection:

Shem, meaning “the name,” stands for the first degree, which is to sanctify the Holy Name within us and to do repentance for our flaws.

Cham, meaning “warmth,” the second degree, represents the warmth in our prayers needed to do battle against the return of our former faults.

The third degree, Yafes, meaning “beautifying” or “perfecting,” offers Hashem perfect devotion, a devotion that should burn within us.

## **HOW TO SERVE HASHEM**

### **Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa**

*“And Noach had begotten three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafes.” (6:10)*

The Torah calls Noach a tzaddik and from the names he gave to his three sons, we can learn from him the proper path to Avodas Hashem:

Shem (name) - One must always focus on the ineffable Name of Hashem so as not to sin.

Cham (warm) - All mitzvos should be performed with the maximum amount of energy and warmth.

Yafes (beauty) - Every action and deed should beautify the individual and at the same time glorify Hashem.

## **TOXIC ENVIRONMENT**

### **Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman**

*“The earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence...” (6:11)*

When people are “corrupt before G-d,” i.e., corrupt in their relationship with G-d, lacking awe of G-d, the earth will be “filled with violence” among people, for where there is no awe of G-d, no civilized society can exist.

## **ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS**

### **Kotzker Rebbe**

*“The earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence...” (6:11)*

It is a mistake to think that man can exist without faith and fear of Heaven, while only fulfilling the commandments between man and his fellow man.

The Torah tells us: “And the earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence.” Once the point of “the earth was corrupt before G-d” is reached, and the yoke of Heaven is thrown off and the people sin against Hashem, the immediate result is: “The earth was filled with violence.”

## **GLOBAL INFLUENCE**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“For all flesh had corrupted its way on the Earth...” (6:12)*

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 108) teaches that the horrible effects of the flood wiped out not only the people of that generation but also the animals. This is referred to in this pasuk, which states that *“kol basar - all flesh”* had become corrupt. This point is hard to understand. A human being, who has free will to do good or evil, at times may become corrupt. But how can an animal, which has no free will, veer from performing the will of Hashem?

The Beis HaLevi, R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt'l, ascertains that this is a fundamental lesson regarding the nature of man. It is known that if a person becomes used to transgressing, it becomes part of his nature and is very hard for him to change. This effect influences not only the person himself, but also the people around him. Even if a person sins privately, he is strengthening the forces of desire in the world. Consequently, other people are influenced by these forces and are also led to sin. When humanity sinks to low levels of depravity, even the animals are affected by it.

This is what happened during the generation of Noach, when even the animals were sinning with species other than their own. Conversely, just as the wicked influence the entire world with their sins, the righteous also affect the entire world with their mitzvos. The Sefer Mesillas Yesharim teaches that a person who rules over himself and serves Hashem is considered an assistant of Hashem Himself, and he is uplifted as he uplifts the entire world with Him.

## **AWAKENING MERCY**

### **Radamsker Rebbe**

*“And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth...” (6:12)*

The Midrash states that Avraham asked Noach's son Shem how they were saved from the flood. He answered that they had mercy on the animals and birds, so Hashem had mercy on them.

If the people would have had mercy on each other, they would have awakened the mercy above and they, too, would have been saved. However, they were wicked and petty to each other and had no mercy. *“And G-d saw the earth and behold it was corrupted”* - so G-d had no mercy on all their wickedness.

## **THE ONLY OPTION**

### **Reb Aryeh Leib of Plotzk**

*“[G-d said to Noach,] ‘for the earth is filled with violence through them...’” (6:13)*

Their fate was sealed only on account of the robbery they committed. (Rashi)

In a comment immediately preceding this statement, Rashi notes that their sin consisted of indecent behavior and immorality. Why, then, does he state that their death was decreed only because of the robbery of which they were guilty?

Rashi wants to indicate that if they had possessed wealth acquired by legitimate means, G-d might have taken their wealth rather than their lives to punish them for their immorality.

According to the Sages (Vayikra Rabbah 17), *“the Merciful One does not decree the death penalty immediately.”* G-d first punishes sinners by depriving them of their wealth; it is only in cases where this is of no avail that He takes someone's life.

However, a person's wealth can be taken as atonement in place of the death penalty only if the person acquired the wealth honestly. Once the person loses that wealth, it means that the sin has been paid for. But if this wealth was not acquired lawfully, the loss of property cannot be accepted as atonement and the person will not be spared the death penalty.

Had the Flood generation been guilty only of indecent behavior and immorality, G-d would not have destroyed them immediately but would have first punished them by stripping them of their possessions. But since they had gained all their wealth through theft, it was not truly their own and could not be accepted as atonement.

Therefore, G-d decreed the death penalty for them immediately, declaring that He would blot out all of them from the face of the earth.

## **NEVER TOO LATE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“G-d said to Noach, ‘I have decided to put an end to all flesh...’” (6:13)*

G-d did not bring on the Flood because He suddenly realized that He had made a mistake by creating the world. Rather, the pre-Flood and post-Flood realities were necessary stages in the world's development, stages that are reflected in every individual's life.

Before the Flood, reality was locked into the irresistible forces of cause and effect. Every good choice reinforced goodness permanently; every bad choice reinforced evil permanently.

The Flood softened reality by introducing the opportunity of repentance. Thus, when Noach emerged from the ark, what he beheld was not a ruined, post-apocalyptic devastation, but a new, fresh, world, full of promise and free from the shackles of the past.

In our own lives, too, we can mistakenly think that we are inescapably locked into a destiny dictated to us by our heredity, our upbringing, or our own prior errors. Because of the Flood, the exact opposite is true: it is never too late.

G-d is always waiting to welcome us back with open arms to begin anew. Repentance, like the Flood, enables us to transform any challenging situation or turbulent phase of our lives into a means to cleanse us, refine us, and prepare us to carry on with greater faith and strength. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, pp. 285-287) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **PURIFYING WATERS**

### **Baal HaTanya**

*"G-d said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to all flesh...'" (6:13)*

If the intention of the flood was only to destroy the wicked evildoers, surely Hashem could have destroyed them in some other way. Rather, the purpose of the flood was to purify the world from the uncleanness of that generation's corruption. The forty days of rain correspond to the forty *se'ah* required in a *mikvah*.

Furthermore, Chazal tell us that the holy Land of Israel remained untouched by the flood. This is additional proof that the true purpose of the flood was the rest of the world's spiritual purification.

## **ARK OF WORDS**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Make the ark with compartments, and cover it inside and outside with pitch..." (6:14)*

*Kinim* (קנים, compartments) is similar to *Kein* (קן, bird's nest). (Bereishit Rabbah 31:9)

The Talmud (Erekhin 16) teaches that the disease of *tzara'at* is a punishment for evil speech. In order to be purified of *tzara'at*, a person must bring a sacrifice of birds - for, as our Sages state (Vayikra Rabbah 16:7), "Let the chattering birds come and effect forgiveness for the chattering person."

*Teivah* (ark) also means "word." A person's "ark," his refuge from the floodwaters of negativity that overwhelm him, consists of his rectifying his every "word."

Thus, our Sages associate the ark's compartments with bird's nests - which are reminiscent of the bird sacrifices that one brings in the course of rectifying his speech. And when a person attains exemplary speech, that creates purity and eventually leads to peace and unity. (See Likutey Moharan I, 14:9)

## **THREE DIMENSIONAL DEVOTION**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"Three hundred cubits shall be the length of the ark, fifty cubits its breadth, and thirty cubits its height..." (6:15)*

As mentioned previously, the word for ark [תבה] can also mean "word" or "speech." Before a person says something, he should first consider the exaltedness and

greatness of G-d. This will lead the person to love and fear G-d's Name, and then to a rapturous experience of the Divine. In this manner, he elicits G-d's beneficence into the world.

The dimensions of the ark correspond to these three stages. The height of the ark alludes to reflection on G-d's exaltedness. The breadth of the ark, from north to south, refers to love and fear of G-d's Name. [Throughout the Torah, directional orientation is that of a person facing east. In this orientation, north is to the left and south to the right. Since love and fear are associated respectively with the right and left arms of the human being, it follows that love is associated with the direction of south and fear with north.]

Its length alludes to the individual's rapturous delight in his Divine experience, and the Divine beneficence that is thereby elicited into the worlds, from east to west. [East is the forward, anterior direction and west is the posterior direction. The flow of Divine beneficence into the world is described here as occurring from the "front" of the world, its spiritual dimension, to its "back," or material dimension.]

These three stages are alluded to by the dimensions of the ark because the ark was the means that G-d provided for rescuing humanity from the Flood, i.e., for ensuring the continued flow of Divine beneficence into the world.

## **STAGES OF LIFE**

### **Reb Elimelech Lizensk**

*"With bottom, second, and third stories you shall make it [the ark]..." (6:16)*

These three levels represent the three periods in a person's life:

When he is young, he is most vulnerable to transgressions.

In his middle age, he is too involved with making a livelihood to sin.

In his old age, he can work for self-improvement and to repair the injuries to his soul that he had caused until then. It is for this reason that the Torah says, "Thou shall make it" near the "third story."

## **WORDS OF TRUTH**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Put the entrance of the ark in its side. With bottom, second, and third stories you shall make it..." (6:16)*

Petach (door) literally means "opening." Words of truth create an opening so that other people may see how to emerge from their darkness. (See Likutey Moharan I, 112)

When we utter words of prayer with truth, they sustain all levels of existence. (See Likutey Moharan I, 112)

## LOOKING HEAVENWARDS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"You shall make a light for the ark and finish it to a cubit from above. Put the entrance of the ark in its side..." (6:16)*

Noach was commanded to construct the ark with a sloped roof that had a light at its summit.

A person must learn to look upwards, beyond this material world, to Heaven, and nullify himself to G-d.

Had Noach been able to attain complete self-nullification, he would have affected forgiveness for his generation, much as Moshe did for his generation.

But since Noach attained only a partial self-nullification, G-d, in His kindness, enabled Noach to enter the ark to at least "close himself off" from the world and protect himself and his family. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 482)

## SHEDDING LIGHT

### Sefas Emes

*"You shall make a light for the Ark..." (6:16)*

The Mishnah uses the word *teivah* ("ark") to denote the Ark of the Torah. Accordingly, *teivah* implies the word of Torah and prayer, which can save us from drowning in the flood of grossness and materialism that has overrun the world.

The above pasuk, then, may be interpreted to mean that "you shall shed light upon the word," i.e., that every Torah teaching and prayer we utter must be lucid and clear to all.

## VESSEL FOR KINDNESS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Everything that is on the earth shall perish..." (6:17)*

Until the Revelation at Sinai, when the continuation of the world became contingent upon the Jews' acceptance of the Torah, mankind was sustained through G-d's kindness. Nevertheless, punishment was meted out in this world (e.g., the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah).

The reason for this seeming dichotomy is that G-d desires *chesed* (kindness) and is willing to grant a stay of punishment if people are cognizant of His kindness, even in a distant sort of way. Such recognition gives them the merit to have a vessel with which to receive His kindness.

But if people deny G-d completely, they destroy their vessel and can no longer receive His kindness. Thus, suffering could exist even in a world sustained by kindness.

When the evil peaked during the Generation of the Flood, only Noach was saved through G-d's kindness. As our Sages teach (Sanhedrin 108): "Even Noach was included in the decree to be wiped out in the Flood, but he found favor in G-d's eyes."

Ten generations later, Avraham became known as the "man of *chesed* (kindness)" and his deeds brought stability to the world. Thus, Avraham merited to be the first to reveal the Holy Land, because he aroused the purpose of Creation: G-d's desire to do kindness for His creatures and to reveal His might.

## PROVIDING SHELTER

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Of all living beings, of all flesh, you must bring two of each species into the ark with you; they must be male and female..." (6:19)*

Metaphorically, the Flood represents the distractions that threaten to "drown" our Divine consciousness, and the ark is the safe environment of Torah study and prayer that we construct to rescue ourselves from the world's distractions. In this sense, each of us is a Noach, whose duty it is to bring anyone and everyone in danger of spiritually "drowning" - ourselves included - into the shelter of our personal, spiritual "ark."

The doctrine of Divine Providence implies that when G-d arranges for us to know that someone is in danger, it is because He wants us to help that person and bring him or her closer to G-dliness. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## RECTIFYING EATING

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"Take for yourself of every food that is eaten..." (6:21)*

The word for "food" used in this verse [מאכל] can be read, "to give others to eat" [מאכיל].

On this basis, we can explain the comments of the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 19:12) on the verse "Adam said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me gave me to eat of the tree, and I will eat'" (Bereishis 3:12) - "He did not say I ate [אכלתי] in the past tense, but I will eat [ואכל], meaning, 'I ate and I will continue to eat.'"

The underlying principle here is the following: When a Jewish person eats, he rectifies the blemish caused by Adam's consumption of forbidden food. In other words, by observing the various commandments that Jews perform when eating - whether by reciting a blessing before and after eating; or by performing all the various mitzvos that a Jew performs in preparing food for consumption, such as - in the case of meat - slaughtering it in the prescribed fashion, salting it, and so on; or in the case of other types of food, the various mitzvos we perform in their preparation - we correct the blemish caused by Adam.

That is why, as the Midrash teaches us, he said, "I will eat"; rather than saying "I ate," he said, "I ate and I will continue to eat." In other words, "By my descendants and I continuing to eat in the future only in a way governed by the relevant mitzvos, the blemish that I caused will be rectified."



Consequently, since Adam caused a defect through his eating, man now has to eat properly and thereby rectify Adam's improper eating. As such, Adam's eating can be termed "that which causes others to eat [מאכיל]." For this eating - i.e., that of the forbidden fruit - is the reason why humanity must make it a point to eat. Thus, when we eat, we do so not merely out of the physical necessity to sustain ourselves, but also for the spiritual purpose of rectifying Adam's sin.

## **SATISFIED AND SATIATED**

### **Vilna Gaon**

*"Take for yourself of every food that is eaten, and it shall be food for you and for them..." (6:21)*

The phrase "that is eaten" seems redundant. Moreover, the question may be asked how there could possibly have been sufficient space in the Ark to store a year's supply of food for all the people, cattle, animals and birds gathered there.

The phrase "that is eaten" was inserted to answer this question. According to the Sages (Yoma 80), "of every food that is eaten" refers to food that can be eaten in one swallowing, namely, an amount the size of a hen's egg.

This would mean that the Ark could accommodate the food supply easily, for G-d commanded Noach to provide amounts of food no bigger than the size of a hen's egg for each meal for all the people and animals in the Ark. And G-d blessed the food, saying "it shall be food for you and for them"; i.e., the people and the animals will find even these small amounts of food sufficient and satisfying during their time in the Ark.

## **SAFE HAVEN FOR ALL**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Enter the ark, you and your entire household..." (7:1)*

Allegorically, "entering the ark" means that we should immerse ourselves in the study of the Torah and in prayer, in order to protect ourselves from the "flood" of worldly distractions that threaten to "drown" us in materialism.

This does not mean, however, that when we do this we should become unconcerned about the needs of others.

We must not be content with our own self-preservation alone. We are empowered to bring our families, our children, and ultimately the entire world into a wholesome, safe haven of Torah study and prayer. The plight of our fellow person should give us no rest, for we are all like one body - if one of us is spiritually ill, we are all affected, and the health of our collective self positively affects the health of each one of us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 8-10) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **ENTERING THE ARK**

### **Baal Shem Tov**

*"Enter the Ark, you and all your household..." (7:1)*

Our souls enter this world on spiritual missions, but we find ourselves preoccupied with earning a livelihood in order to sustain our households through the toil of our hands.

If we allow ourselves to become obsessed with our work and driven by the worries of earning a livelihood, we can drown in mundane pursuits.

Our solution is contained in the above verse: "Enter the ark!" The Hebrew word for ark - *teivah* - also means a word. If we are beset with a flood of mundane concerns, we must enter the sacred words, so that when we pray, we enter within and attach ourselves to the very letters of our prayers. When we study, we must enter within and attach ourselves to the sacred letters of the Torah.

In the merit of our attachment to the words of prayer and study, we will be granted a spiritual salvation that parallels Noach's physical salvation, which included "his sons and his wife and his sons' wives" (7:7). Our families will enter the *teivah* along with us, because Heaven will ensure that all their needs are met.

## **FOR THE RIGHT REASONS**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*"Enter the ark, you and your entire household..." (7:1)*

When Hashem instructed Noach to build the *teivah*, He chose to leave out the reason why for several pesukim. A number of pesukim later, Hashem shared with Noach that the reason that he was commanded to construct the *teivah* was in order to be saved from the flood.

Why didn't Hashem share the reason with Noach earlier in order to motivate Noach to embark on this enormous project?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) explains that Hashem wanted to give Noach the opportunity to fulfill the mandate of Hashem without any ulterior motives. Had Hashem disclosed the reason for building the *teivah* initially, Noach's motivation would have been to save himself and his family from the flood. By withholding the impetus for the construction, Hashem was providing Noach with the *zechus* of doing something simply because Hashem had asked him to do so.

As we resume our daily routines, let us focus less on how we can benefit from each opportunity. Instead, each time we engage in a new activity, initiative or decision this year, we should ask ourselves: "Is this what Hashem wants us to do?" If we approach our relationship with Hashem in this manner, we will surely develop a stronger and more meaningful connection with Him.



## RECTIFIED BY MOSHE

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"...for I have seen you to be righteous before Me..." (7:1)*

This verse can be understood based on what it says in the holy Zohar (1:67b) regarding Moshe, who exclaimed (Shemos 32:32), "Erase me, now, from Your book." [After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jewish people, offering various justifications for their behavior. Moshe even went so far as to ask G-d to take his life if He would not forgive the Jews.]

The letters of the word for "erase" [מחני] can be permuted to spell the words for "the water of Noach" [מי נח]. [Yeshayahu HaNavi uses the idiom "the water of Noach" as a reference to G-d's promise not to destroy the world again after the Flood, comparing G-d's promise to forgive the Jewish people in the future to this promise. This, Noach's name, alludes to G-d's forgiveness, which was realized only later in history, not in Noach's time.]

When Moshe exhibited self-sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people by asking G-d to kill him if He would not forgive them for the sin of the Golden Calf, he rectified the soul of Noach, who had failed to ask for clemency for the people of his generation. Moshe could rectify Noach's soul through his selfless action because Moshe comprised all souls, including Noach's (see the Zohar there).

As is known, Moshe was called a tzaddik [צדיק] because he justified [מצדיק] everyone's behavior to G-d, finding extenuating circumstances for people's failures.

## FAITH IN OTHERS

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"And Noach went with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him into the ark due to the waters of the flood..." (7:7)*

Rashi comments on this verse: "Even Noach was one of those of little faith; he was a believer, but he did not believe fully that the flood would actually come, and therefore he did not enter the Ark until the waters forced him to." And yet, the Torah calls Noach "righteous," a term certainly not referring to someone without perfect faith in Hashem! Therefore, how could Rashi possibly suggest that Noach doubted for a moment that Hashem could fulfill His promise to destroy the world?

Rav Yitzchak Kalish, known as Rav Yitzchak of Vorki, interprets Rashi in a different way. He stresses that the same words can be read differently, as follows: "Even Noach was a believer in those of little faith..." Noach was so sure that the people would repent that "...he did not believe that the flood would actually come..." because he honestly felt that Hashem would accept their repentance without hesitation and annul His decree to destroy the world. Therefore "...he did not enter the ark until the waters forced him to." It was only when he saw that the people had not repented, he was forced to concede and enter the ark.

## KEEPING THE FAITH

### Rabbi Ari Ciment

*"And Noach went with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him into the Ark due to the waters of the flood..." (7:7)*

Yehoshua ben Perachia would say: "Make for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every man to the side of merit." (Avos 1:6)

In our parashah, it states: "And Noach went in and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him into the Ark because of the flood waters."

Rashi quotes the midrash on this verse: Because of the flood waters: Noach, too, was of those who had little faith, believing and not believing that the Flood would come, and he did not enter the ark until the waters forced him to do so. (Bereishis Rabbah 32:6)

Now isn't this very unexpected, that Noach is declared a tzaddik by the Torah, but the midrash posits that Noach had little faith? Since we are taught in the above ethic to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, shouldn't we assume Noach was not belittling G-d by delaying his boarding onto the Ark? Also, the wording here is a bit strange in Rashi: "אף נח מקטני אמנה היה." Why start a sentence with the word אף, which means "even"?

An idea brought down in Aharon Greenberg's Iturei Torah is that you can read Rashi differently by moving over the comma: אף נח מקטני אמנה היה מאמין - that Noach believed even in those with small faith" - that they would appease G-d by virtue of their small faith. Not that Noach was with small faith, but rather that he even placed hope/belief in those with very little faith, and thus he didn't believe that G-d would ultimately destroy the world. He was a believer in the potential of humanity. He was forced into the Ark not because he was of small faith, but rather because he believed in those with "small faith" that they would suffice to ratchet up G-d's mercy to save the world! In other words, he was an optimist par excellence.

With the understanding of Rashi that Noach was the optimist, holding out until the very end, perhaps Rashi starts with the unusual word אף to further illustrate the idea: אף נח מקטני אמנה היה - Noach's nose [אף also means nose] did not have faith." Noach was a "מאמין ואינו מאמין." He had such firm belief in his fellow man that they would repent and that G-d would renege on His doomsday pledge that, "ולא נבנס לתיבה עד שדחקהו המים" - he didn't go into the Ark until the waters climbed up to his nose [and he couldn't breathe anymore!] In other words, Noach had put so much faith in mankind/humanity (perhaps a bit too much) that he waited until being forced by his nose (because he couldn't breathe any longer!) to enter the Ark.

Takeaway message: Although the classical way to read the Rashi and midrash is seemingly disparaging in questioning Noach's belief in G-d, there is also another way to read it that rather glowingly espouses his belief in the concept of judging others favorably.

קא/Even Noach believed in those with little faith, i.e., that they could ultimately sway G-d's decree. Being a tzaddik therefore means trying to see the good in others, even if it means having to hold out until the waters are climbing and reaching your קא/nose! Noach teaches us not to give up on humanity so fast. He was thus indeed a tzaddik who did not have little faith, but rather had faith קא/even in those with little faith!

## **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*"And Noach went with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him into the Ark due to the waters of the flood..." (7:7)*

Rashi comments that Noach had a low level of emunah because, as the pasuk states, he only entered the *teivah* once it began to rain and the waters started to rise. Many struggle with how it could be that Noach's faith was so low when he was chosen as the righteous person to preserve the world.

The Kedushas Levi explains that Rashi isn't suggesting that Noach delayed his entry into the *teivah* because he had little belief in Hashem. Instead, Rashi means to say that Noach had little faith in himself. He didn't see why he should be saved any more than anyone else. He naturally assumed that if he would be saved, then so would everyone else, which is why he waited until the very last minute.

Belief in oneself is critical to one's relationship with Hashem. If a person does not recognize his or her strengths, then he or she is not going to develop them and use them to contribute to the world or in their service of Hashem. Let us utilize this lesson from Noach as an opportunity to reflect on and identify what we are capable of in all facets of our lives so that the best is yet to come!

## **CLEAR RULINGS**

### **Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman**

*"Of the pure animal and of the animal that is not pure..." (7:8)*

The Torah employs a circumlocution of eight letters rather than use a crude expression. (Pesachim 3a)

Why doesn't the Torah use this circumlocution ("not clean") in the many other passages where the text plainly states "such and such shall be unclean..."?

This passage in Bereishis is a historical account and not a legal discussion. Hence, the prohibition against using crude expressions applies here. However, the other passages are laws specifying what is clean and what is not, and in setting forth laws and regulations one should not resort to euphemisms or circumlocutions but state clearly and forthrightly, "such and such is clean" and "such and such is unclean for you."

## **IMPACTFUL WORDS**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"Of the pure animal and of the animal that is not pure..." (7:8)*

The Gemara (Pesachim 3a) teaches us a unifying principle: the Torah does not "waste" words. Every single letter is meaningful, and as such, every seemingly superfluous word or phrase deserves further analysis. With this in mind, the Gemara asks on our verse why the Torah was written with the words "of the animal that is not pure" when it could have written "of the animal that is *tamei* (impure)" - thus saving eight letters!

The Gemara answers that this extra word, despite being lengthier, nonetheless "saves" the Torah from writing the word "*tamei*" explicitly. Therefore, we are being taught a very important lesson - we too must always be careful not to speak in a vulgar way...

Words are so powerful; they have the power to heal or to destroy. On the one hand, they define our character, yet on the other hand, the words that we use have the power to affect us and change our nature.

Similarly, the Ramban (Iggeres HaRamban) writes in a letter to his son: "Become accustomed to always speaking all your words calmly to everyone at all times, and if you follow this, you will be saved from anger."

So too, we can benefit greatly by exercising the power of speech with tremendous care and control. Whether it is being meticulous not to speak lashon hara or just giving positive encouragement, we should not underestimate one of the greatest tools we have to make the world a better place.

## **TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth..." (7:11)*

Parashas Noach relates the cause, result, and aftermath of the flood. As the flood began, the pasuk tells us that the springs of "*tehom rabah*" opened up (7:11). While the phrase means "the great deep," the Gemara (Sanhedrin 108a) explains that the use of the term "*rabah*" is a direct reference to the misdeeds of that generation, previously described as the great evil of man, or "*rabah ra'as ha'adam*" (6:5). How are the "great" springs opening up an appropriate punishment for man's "great" evils?

The sefer Toldos Yitzchak explains that the misdeeds of the generation were "*rabah*," which means "great," but also means "excessive." People followed their desires too far and could not find satisfaction. As an appropriate consequence, they were punished with excessive amounts of water, a resource that, when taken in proper quantities, would be a blessing. While the generation of the flood perished, we have the opportunity to be measured and balanced and should strive to avoid basking in too much of a good thing.

## **POWER OF REPENTANCE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights...” (7:12)*

Rashi explains: When G-d began the Flood, He first made it rain mercifully - as regular rain - so that if the generation would repent, the falling water would become normal, seasonal rain. When they still did not repent, the rain became a flood.

Although G-d had warned the people about the impending Flood 120 years earlier, and seeing Noach build the ark this entire period was a constant reminder of G-d's warning, the people still did not repent during that entire span of time. Even after watching Noach enter the ark and witnessing the accompanying miracles, they still did not repent. And yet, if they had repented at this point - even after the rain started - not only would they have been spared the Flood, they would have been showered with rains of blessing. This demonstrates the incredible power of repentance, which has the power to transform all misfortune into good, even in a split second. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, p. 520) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **PURIFYING PUNISHMENT**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*“And the flood was on the earth for forty days...” (7:17)*

The Torah uses two different words to describe the waters of the flood. A few verses earlier, the waters of the flood are described as גשם - rain (7:12), whereas in our verse they are called מַבּוּל - flood. Why is there a change in expression?

Rashi explains that when Hashem first brought the rain, it was with רַחֲמִים - mercy; it was a gentle rain as a warning of what was about to take place. The hope was that even at the last minute, the wicked people would realize that their actions were about to cause devastation, and they would repent. When Hashem saw that they were not changing their ways, He intensified the rain and brought a flood. This is a clear demonstration of Hashem's endless and boundless love for humanity.

It took Noach 120 years to build the ark, and he was instructed to construct it in public so that people would see and ask him what he was doing. He would tell them that there is going to be a flood.

They would ask him why. He would tell them because of their depraved behavior.

They would ask him what they could do to avoid the impending disaster. He would tell them to do teshuvah.

They would say no thanks!

And this continued for 120 years! They got to the point of no return. There was no hope for them.

However, Hashem never gives up on people, and maybe, just maybe, there is a chance that even at the last moment they will come back! (L'titecha Elyon, p. 80)

So, at first, He brought a light rain, hoping that the people will have a last-minute change of heart. Only when it was too late did Hashem change the rain into a flood.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l, writes that this mixture of רַחֲמִים and דִּין is a message found in the flood in general.

The rain came down for forty days and destroyed the earth, the land. It wiped out civilization, and the world needed to start again from Noach, his family, and the animals in the ark. It was unprecedented destruction and מַדַּת דִּין - Hashem's manifestation of strict justice.

On the other hand, the rain of forty days is akin to the forty *seah* of rainwater needed to fill a mikvah. In the same way a mikvah purifies, so too, the rain cleansed and purified the earth that had become contaminated through the evil deeds of the people who inhabited it.

Hashem in His Mercy didn't just destroy the world and mankind but cleansed it and prepared it for a new beginning of purity and purpose.

Thus, the entire flood was a mixture of דִּין and רַחֲמִים, which teaches us the essential lesson that Hashem is not interested in punishment for punishment's sake. Hashem punishes as a way of preparing for a brighter future.

## **DEVOTION TO OTHERS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Only Noach and those who were with him in the ark survived...” (7:23)*

Noach and his family took care of the animals faithfully and humanely throughout their year in the ark, even though feeding all of them was an exhausting task. Even when one of the lions struck Noach for delivering their meal late, this only strengthened Noach's concern for his charges.

Like Noach and his family, we are all responsible for providing for the needs of those together with us in this world, our “ark.” This applies to their material needs, of course, but also and especially to their spiritual needs. Like Noach and his family, we can persevere in our task despite its difficulty.

The incident with the lion teaches us the importance of being acutely sensitive to the discomfort of others, providing for their needs promptly. If we are tempted to consider their necessities mere luxuries, we should recall that we have no way of estimating another person's true, inner worth; each might possess a lofty soul and therefore be a “lion,” a “king” (see Pesachim 50a). Moreover, while we should indeed assume that whenever we suffer it is because we deserve to, we should always assume that others deserve only the best. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 53-56) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **FOR THE REMNANT OF YISRAEL**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"Only Noach and those who were with him in the ark survived..." (7:23)*

The Midrash derives from the extra word "ach (only)" that in one instance Noach was late in bringing food to the lion and was subsequently mauled by the beast.

Why was Noach deserving of punishment for being a few minutes late, especially when every other day he fed all the animals on time, carrying out this difficult task with utter dedication?

Rav Avraham Kalmanovitz zt'l, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, answered this question in a speech to the Vaad Hatzalah of America following the Second World War. R' Kalmanovitz explained, "The animals in Noach's *teivah* were the only remnants of a world that was, and they deserved special attention. Noach was also a remnant of that world, and thus he carried the burden of caring for these special creatures. Therefore, he was judged strictly, as his purpose was to sustain the whole world."

Movingly, R' Kalmanovitz continued. "So too, we were saved from the murderers. Just two from a village, one from an entire family, remain. The burden lies on our shoulders to strengthen ourselves and save our brethren who are the remnant of Klal Yisrael!"

## **LACK OF OUTREACH**

### **Reb Meir Shapiro of Lublin**

*"Only Noach and those who were with him in the ark survived..." (7:23)*

The Torah doesn't say "and Noach, a righteous and wholehearted man, was left," but simply "only Noach was left." According to the Midrash, Noach - by doing nothing to persuade his contemporaries to mend their ways - was himself guilty of a sin. One who does not act to make others better thereby descends to a lower level.

When Noach found that he and his family were the Flood's only survivors, he realized that he was Noach "only"; he was then filled with a sense of inadequacy because he had done nothing to save the others from the fate that befell them.

## **ELICITING KINDNESS**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"Hashem remembered Noach and all the beasts and all the animals that were with him in the Ark..." (8:1)*

On this pasuk, the Midrash quotes the words of Dovid HaMelech in Tehillim (145:9): "*Tov Hashem lakol v'rachamav al kol ma'asav* - Hashem is good to all and His mercy is on all His creations." Noach worked tirelessly on behalf of the many animals residing in the Ark, and as a result, Hashem remembered his kindness and saved him.

Certainly, when human beings show kindness to one another - and to all of Hashem's creations - He will shower mercy and everlasting kindness upon them.

One Erev Yom Kippur, the entire congregation of Salant gathered in the central shul to begin Kol Nidrei. As the hour grew late there was still no sign of the holy Rav, R' Yisrael Salanter zt'l. The congregants went to search for him.

They found him at home, holding a small pan of milk and trying to coax a cat into his house. They watched as he succeeded in luring the cat inside, then made ready for tefillah.

"What was that all about?" some of the observers asked.

"As you know," R' Yisrael explained, "I have a large collection of sefarim on my bookshelves. Many of these sefarim do not belong to me, but to people who do not have enough space to store their own books and sefarim. They know they can trust me to watch over them and that I will use them as well."

"Usually," R' Yisrael continued, "there is a constant stream of people coming through my home. People come to ask me questions, discuss their problems, and so on. With all the people in my house, I feel confident that the sefarim are safe. However, on Yom Kippur, and especially the night of Kol Nidrei, people are in shul. I worried that due to the absence of activity in my home, mice might find their way inside, and damage the sefarim."

"Then I had an idea. If I bring a cat off the street and allow it to roam in my house, the mice wouldn't dare come in. This way I can accomplish a double benefit. As Chazal tell us, '*Kol ha'merachem al ha'briyos, merachamim alav min ha'shamayim* - Whoever has mercy on creation, is shown mercy from Heaven.' By taking pity on a stray cat and simultaneously protecting the sefarim of the poor people, I can hopefully elicit kindness and mercy from Hashem."

## **DOING OUR PART**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"At the end of forty days, Noach opened the window in the ark he had made, and he sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth..." (8:6-7)*

As the Torah will recount, Noach did not leave the ark until G-d told him to do so. So what was the purpose of seeing if the land was dry by sending out these birds?

The answer is that since G-d had entrusted him with the survival of life, Noach felt responsible to take whatever natural steps would encourage G-d to hasten the renewal of life on earth.

The pain of exile is compared to the raging waters of the Flood. Like the Flood, only G-d can end the exile. But, like Noach, we can hasten the redemption by actively yearning for it and doing all in our power to hasten its arrival. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 4, pp. 2407-2409) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky



## **PREPARING FOR SALVATION**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*“And Noah sent out the raven... and he sent out the dove...” (8:7-8)*

Noach had to be told when to enter and exit the ark. It seems that he saw his role as being a follower rather than taking initiative. But the Lubavitcher Rebbe notes that we find that Noach prepared for his exit by sending the raven and the dove. Why the switch?

After he entered the ark, Noach realized that he had to take charge and was now responsible for ensuring the continuity of life after the flood. Whereas before he may have been playing a passive part in the unfolding drama, now he has an active role and is the star of the show.

Therefore, when Noach thinks that the waters have subsided, he was active and sends out the birds.

While, indeed, he can only leave the ark when Hashem tells him, he can prepare himself now so that he is ready when that moment comes.

The Rebbe says that the same is true of the galus - the exile, that has enveloped the world for so long, in the same way that the flood covered the earth.

The waters of the galus seem to be receding, and although the end of the galus will only be when Hashem brings it, we must not be passive. We must actively prepare so that we are ready for the moment when the Mashiach arrives. (Le'hachayos es Hayom, p. 29)

- We must actively prepare by committing to fulfill the mitzvos in the best way we can.
- We must actively prepare by behaving in a way that will attract others toward a life of Torah and mitzvos.
- We must actively prepare by sincerely desiring an end to this painful exile and by asking Hashem to bring it.

## **INVESTING IN THE FUTURE**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*“And the dove came back to him... and behold! An olive leaf it had plucked with its beak!” (8:11)*

Why was it specifically an olive branch that the dove brought back to Noach? What is the message contained in the fact that this particular tree was a sign that the waters had subsided?

The Techeiles Mordechai quotes the Midrash that says that Noach was only saved due to the future generations that would be born to him. This, he says, is what is meant by juxtaposing the last verse in Parashas Bereishis that says, *וְנָח מִצָּה חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'*, with the beginning of our parashah that says, *וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ*.

Why did Noach find favor in the eyes of Hashem? Because of *וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ*, i.e., his future generations.

The Ramban adds that the Mishnah in Tamid (2:3) says that *“כל העצים נשרים למערכה חוץ מהזית והגפן”* - it is permitted to use any wood on the pyre on the Altar in the Temple except for olive wood or wood of the vine.”

The reason why these two types of wood are forbidden is that these woods represent olive oil and wine, namely, they have a future and therefore cannot be burned. They are saved on account of their future fruit. The fruit of a tree does not usually last long, but fruit that can be turned into oil or wine has a long-lasting future.

This is the message of the olive branch with which the dove returned: just as the olive wood cannot be burnt on the Mizbeach and is saved on account of its future products, so too, you Noach are being saved on account of your future generations.

Therefore, the first thing Noach did when he exits the ark is to plant a vine - the second of the woods that are not permitted on the Mizbeach because they have future potential as wine.

By planting the vine, Noach showed that he had internalized the message that he was only saved on account of his future generations.

The future belongs to our children and grandchildren. Let us invest in the world's future by investing in them!

## **BY THE MERIT OF MITZVOS**

### **Maharal**

*“The land became dry...” (8:14)*

After the Torah describes the harrowing events of the flood - the incessant rain, the destruction of all living creatures, the receding waters, Noach's attempt to determine if the land was yet habitable, etc. - it concludes with the words *יבשה הארץ* - the land (finally) became dry.

The numerical value of these two seemingly redundant words adds up to 613, which teaches us that in the merit of the 613 commandments that would be given to Bnei Yisrael in the future, the world was finally dry and ready to be lived in again.

## **ENGAGING THE WORLD**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“G-d spoke to Noach, saying ‘Leave the ark!’” (8:15-16)*

As we have seen, “entering the ark” is a metaphor for the need to immerse ourselves in Torah study and prayer. However, the true purpose of entering the ark is to leave it.

G-d commands us - as He commanded Noach - not to remain in the protective spiritual environment of Torah study and prayer, but to emerge from it, enter the world, and transform the world into G-d's home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 9-10) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## GET OUT THERE

### Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

*"G-d spoke to Noach, saying 'Leave the ark!'" (8:15-16)*

After the flood ended, and the waters subsided, such that the world was once again inhabitable, G-d commanded Noach, **צא מן התיבה** - to leave the ark.

Rav Noson of Breslov, in *Likutei Halachos* (Shabbos), explains this command as referring to something beyond simply exiting the *teivah* (ark). Noach was a righteous figure, but his one fault was his failure to inspire others, to uplift and impact the people around him. He can be said to have lived in the proverbial "ivory tower," focused on his own piety, without extending outward in order to elevate others and help make the world better. In a sense, Noach lived his life in a "*teivah*," secluded and isolated from the people whom he could have influenced. The command **צא מן התיבה** meant that Noach needed to leave his "*teivah*," his ivory tower, and involve himself in teaching and influencing the people around him. As the world would now be rebuilt, he was dutybound to engage, to reach out, and to try to make an impact.

This command of **צא מן התיבה** is directed to each and every one of us, as well. There are hundreds of thousands of fellow Jews right here in our region that have no connection whatsoever to their sacred tradition. And it is our obligation to leave our "*teivah*" and reach out to our beloved brothers and sisters.

Certainly, it is important that we build and maintain a secure, protective spiritual environment, a religious infrastructure where we and our children can grow and develop, free from negative foreign influences. But we cannot remain secluded in this "*teivah*," in our insular environment. We must leave our "*teivah*" and try to influence and inspire every Jew whom we can reach. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of staying inside our "ivory tower" and abandoning our fellow Jews.

**צא מן התיבה**. We need to go out and try to make the greatest impact that we can.

## LEAVING THE ARK

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Leave the ark - you along with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives..." (8:16)*

Noach had to be commanded to enter and exit the ark because he was unsure of his ability to save himself, let alone the entire world, through his prayers. To save himself, he had to hide within the ark - that is, to "hide" in a place of prayer and Torah study. He also had to be commanded to leave the ark, since he did not know what to do upon leaving the house of study.

It is G-d's will that we live in a materialistic world where we must search for G-dliness. We cannot always exist within the confines of the "ark," wrapped up in our prayers.

Therefore, despite the safety of the ark, we must "go out" and experience the challenges of life, its ups and downs.

## CLOTHED IN PRIDE

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"G-d smelled the pleasing aroma..." (8:21)*

The Baal HaTurim notes that according to the *Masorah*, the word for "smelled" in this form appears only twice in Tanach: here, and the other time being, "Yitzchak smelled the aroma of Eisav's clothes" (Bereishis 27:27). [It is worthwhile to examine the entire interpretation given there.]

It appears that this can be explained further based on a teaching that my father and teacher said: "G-d smelled the pleasing aroma." What made this aroma pleasing? The fact that man possesses an evil impulse but overcomes it and serves G-d [as indicated by Noach's animal offering, which expressed the elevation of man's animal side to the service of G-d]. Consequently, "G-d said, 'I will never again curse the earth because of mankind, for the inclination of man is evil from his youth.'" For G-d derives pleasure from our subduing of the evil inclination.

Furthermore, because the Jewish people repress their evil inclination, G-d "clothes" Himself in them, as it says (Yeshayahu 49:3), "Yisrael in whom I will glory" - and the tzaddik R' Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, interpreted the verb "I will glory" [אתפאר] to mean "I will clothe Myself," along the lines of the verse (Bereishis 3:7) "and they sewed [ויתפרו] together fig leaves in order to make themselves loin-cloths." [The idiom of G-d "clothing" Himself in the Jewish people means that He takes pride in them, much as a mortal king shows off his exquisite royal garb by wearing it in public. G-d considers the Jewish people beautiful because they conquer their evil inclination.]

Thus, G-d clothes Himself in the Jewish people, rather than in the Heavenly angels, because of the tremendous pleasure that the Jewish people give Him, which is more pleasure than He receives from anyone else, precisely because they possess an evil inclination and nevertheless conquer it. [Since the angels possess no evil inclination, their service of G-d is not as praiseworthy as that of the Jewish people.]

This is the significance of the phrase "G-d smelled the pleasant fragrance": He smelled, i.e., anticipated, the pleasure that He would derive from the service of man.

This is also the deeper meaning of the verse "He smelled the fragrance of his clothes," which implies that G-d smelled, i.e., anticipated, that mankind would act as His garments in which He clothes Himself.

And because He anticipated the pleasure that He would have from their service, He had compassion on them and swore never to wipe them out again. Understand this and contemplate it.

## **EVOKING MERCY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"...the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth..." (8:21)*

This statement is part of G-d's explanation why He would never again destroy humanity. Yet when G-d examined humanity's behavior before the Flood (6:5), He used the very same statement for precisely the opposite purpose - to explain why humanity should be destroyed!

It was Noach's sacrificial offerings that caused the same argument that had previously invoked G-d's attribute of strict judgment to now invoke His attribute of kindness and mercy. We see here the incredible spiritual power of sacrifices.

It is the same in our own personal lives. When we "sacrifice" ourselves by forgoing our own needs and desires in favor of doing G-d's will, we elicit the same kind of treatment from Him: He will forgo the dictates of His strict justice in order to fulfill our needs and desires. When our behavior is examined in the heavenly court, mitigating factors and rationalizations will be found to either lessen or do away with any punishment for our misdeeds. Evidence that would normally be used against us will be used in our favor, enabling G-d's attribute of mercy to overrule His attribute of strict judgment. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5700, pp. 5, 11-12) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **KEEP BUSY**

### **Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa**

*"Hashem said: 'Never again will I curse the ground... for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth... as long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'" (8:21-22)*

It is written in the Mishnah (Perkei Avos 3:1): "It is good to combine the study of the Torah with some worldly occupation, for the combination of the two keeps sin out of one's mind." Work and study pursued together tend to make one forget sin, whereas idleness is the mother of all sin. An empty mind leaves room for evil thoughts to thrive. As the Rambam put it: "Immoral thoughts gain the upper hand only in a heart empty of words of Torah."

The Flood generation lived in idleness. They didn't have to do any physical labor. According to the Midrash, their fields required sowing only once to obtain crops for the next forty harvests. Besides that, they didn't have the Torah to occupy their minds. Hence, they became corrupt and wanton.

Therefore, it is written (Bereishis 6:5,7): "And G-d saw that man's wickedness was great on the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time... And G-d said: 'I will blot out man whom I have created.'" Because of lack of work and cares, they drifted into sin and had to be destroyed.

But now G-d accepted the sweet savor of Noach's sacrifice and regretted the evil He had decreed. And He said: "I will not curse man again; I will not again seek to destroy man for the impulses of his heart are evil from his youth; it is part of his nature. I have another plan. I will make his life on earth so difficult that he will be forced to work strenuously in order to survive. As long as the earth endures, he shall be compelled to reap, to harvest and to toil to provide for his needs from season to season. 'Day and night shall not cease' - once he is forced to work day and night without respite, he will have little time for sin."

## **UNIFYING DISPARITIES**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"As long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'" (8:21-22)*

Everything that exists within time and space is inherently dissimilar. Seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, and day and night represent disparities in time. Warm climates and cold climates reflect disparities in space.

All these variations point to the greatness of G-d, Who used one mold to create widely disparate things. G-d's greatness is manifest when there is peace, which unites all differences. Torah brings peace because it unites body and soul, and joins time and space with the levels that transcend time and space. (See Likutey Halakhot II, p. 168a)

## **TOO BUSY TO SIN**

### **Reb Aryeh Leib Tzintz**

*"...seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'" (8:21-22)*

Chazal tell us (Kesubos 59b): Idleness leads to immorality. The generation of the *Mabul* lived in idleness and drifted into sin. Only after the Flood did Hashem decree: Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. Only after the flood did man become compelled to constantly reap, harvest and toil to provide for his needs from season to season.

Once he was forced to work day and night without respite, thereby removing any time for idleness in his day, he had little time for sin.

## **REBUKE WITH CAUTION**

### **Yid HaKodesh**

*"Whoever sheds the blood of man, among man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of G-d He made man." (9:6)*

The Sages tell us, "Anyone who embarrasses another in public, it is as if he has shed blood." If we are not absolutely sure that it will cause him to mend his ways, then it is an obvious embarrassment, and that is definitely not permitted.

## **SPIRITUALLY RECEPTIVE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"I am setting up My covenant with you..." (9:9)*

This covenant did not just ensure that the world and its population continue to exist physically. Its deeper intention was that the world be spiritually receptive to being transformed into G-d's home, thereby fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, p. 34)

On account of this covenant, the world is indeed receptive to Divine consciousness. Nonetheless, this promise has not yet been fulfilled in its entirety, and will not be until the Messianic Redemption. On the contrary, we have sadly suffered far too much religious and physical persecution throughout our prolonged exile.

Nevertheless, by clinging to our heartfelt hopes and fervently praying that we should never again undergo or witness the horrors we have experienced in the past, while at the same time dedicating ourselves to our Divine mission with joy and inspiration, we hasten the advent of the final Redemption. At that time, G-d's intention that the world assist us in our Divine mission will be finally fulfilled. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5740, p. 41) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **ELEVATING EARTHLINESS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth..." (9:11)*

When the Torah says that G-d "destroyed the earth," it means that He destroyed "earthliness" - i.e., the mistaken belief that the world exists independent of G-d. The Flood completely submerged the world in Divine awareness, and thus purified it from its moral degeneration and made it permanently receptive to Divine consciousness. Thus, no further Flood would ever be necessary.

Now, thanks to the Flood, we can bring Divine consciousness even into our "earthly" lives. First, we must periodically immerse ourselves in Divinity - in daily prayer and Torah study, the weekly observance of the Sabbath, and the annual Jewish holidays. Then, we must bring this Divine awareness into every facet of our daily lives. These efforts will hasten the world's attainment of complete Divine consciousness in the Messianic Era. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 21-23) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **COLORFUL UNITY**

### **Rav Aharon Yaakov Greenberg**

*"The rainbow will be in the clouds, and I will see it to remember the eternal covenant..." (9:16)*

The rainbow is a sign of peace. It is composed of several colors which, when combined, become one glorious color mass.

By the same token, there are differences between individual people, groups and nations. A life rooted in understanding and tolerance of others leads to unity, which is the basis of the world's existence.

## **SONG OF THE RAINBOW**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"The rainbow will be in the clouds, and I will see it to remember the eternal covenant..." (9:16)*

The rainbow has three primary colors, corresponding to the Patriarchs, who in turn represent the sefirot of *Chesed*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferet*. These *sefirot* also correspond to the elements of fire, air and water.

Since these three elements combine to bring forth song [via the "fire" or warmth of the throat, the "water" or fluids of the mouth, and the "air" expelled from the lungs], when we sing before G-d in prayer, we arouse the merit of the rainbow-covenant that G-d made with mankind as well as the merit of the Patriarchs. Thus, singing before G-d in prayer mitigates strict judgments. (See Likutey Moharan I, 42)

## **FLAMES OF PASSION**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Cham was the father of Canaan..." (9:18)*

Cham in Hebrew means "hot." Allegorically Cham alludes to the soul's burning desire to draw near and cleave to G-d. *Canaan* is sometimes translated as "merchant" (see Yeshayahu 23:8), and thus alludes to the soul's pursuit of the "profit" it earns by studying the Torah and observing G-d's commandments - its increased connection to G-d.

In this context, then, the allegorical meaning of the verse "Cham was the father [i.e., progenitor] of Canaan" is: Our Divine soul is *Cham* ("hot") from the moment it descends into this world; clothed in the body and the animating soul, it experiences a burning desire for G-d's presence. This longing inspires it to become *Canaan* ("a merchant"). It seeks to increase its connection to G-d in reward for studying the Torah and performing the commandments.

Thus, whereas Cham misused his innate passion to focus on his father's inappropriate behavior, we can use our innate passion to fan the flames of our desire to increase G-d's presence in our lives. (Torah Ohr 27a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **FORWARD LOOKING**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*"And Noach began to be a man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard..." (9:20)*

Chazal criticize Noach and say that he should have planted wheat instead of grapes (Rashi). Rabbi Isaac Bernstein asks: What was wrong with grapes, and in what way is wheat better?



Rabbi Simchah Wasserman also asks: What, in fact, was Noach's motivation for choosing to plant grapes first? Why did Noach choose that particular plant as his first foray into agricultural endeavors in the new world?

Rav Simchah answers that when Noach stepped out from the ark, he wanted to sit down and to reminisce - to think back to how life was before the flood - the good old days - and therefore, he wanted wine to act as an aide memoir. After all, whenever we are instructed to recall or to remember something, it is over a glass of wine - זכרונו על היין (Pesachim 106a).

Therefore, the criticism of Noach is that rather than wallow in the past, and rather than drink wine, he should have looked to the future, and he should have planted wheat! Wheat has none of the negative effects that can be found in wine. Wheat is a necessity, and when rebuilding the world and looking to the future, necessities should come first.

On a similar theme, Rabbi Avraham Twersky suggests that Noach's mistake was that he assumed that the world after the flood was exactly the same as the world prior to the flood. What Noach failed to realize was that he lived in a new reality in which the potency of grapes had changed, and consequently, he became drunk on an amount of wine that before the flood would not have affected him adversely. Noach's error lay in his inability to recognize a new existence and to move with it; he remained in the past and did not adapt to the new present.

As Rabbi Bernstein put it so beautifully, time travels in only one direction, and we cannot bring back that which was in the past. Our duty, while remembering the past, is to build for the future.

## **DAMAGING SPEECH**

### **Rabbi Moshe Amiel**

*"Cham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside..." (9:22)*

Noach's son, Cham, told others about his father's drunkenness and was cursed, whereas Noach himself was not. Thus, speaking ill of one who has sinned is worse than he who committed the sin.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"[Shem and Yafes] walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness..." (9:23)*

The Baal Shem Tov taught that the people we encounter in our lives are our mirrors: If we see evil in them, we are really seeing a reflection of the evil within us. Since we are generally blind to our own faults, G-d arranges for us to notice them in someone else, expecting us to take the cue and recognize that we possess these same faults so we can correct them in ourselves.

Thus, since Shem and Yafes did not share their father Noach's weakness, they did not focus on it; instead, they focused on how they could help him. In contrast, Cham did share his father's weakness; therefore, he focused on his father's shame rather than how he could be of help. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 10, pp. 24-29) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower..." (11:4)*

The survivors of the Flood overlooked the Flood's lesson that we should look to G-d as the source of our well-being.

We, the survivors of a "flood" that killed 6,000,000 Jews, should learn from the mistake of the survivors of Noach's Flood. Rebuilding the infrastructure of Jewish civilization is praiseworthy and noble, but it is not an end in itself.

Our "city and tower" must possess a deeper, spiritual purpose, which means that our houses of prayer and Torah study should be the most prominent and cherished buildings in our cities.

Similarly, our careers, homes, lives, and families should express our desire to fulfill G-d's will rather than just empty self-pride. Their Jewish trappings - *mezuzot*, *tefillin*, Shabbat candles, etc. - should be of the highest ritual quality; our collection of Torah books should be well-stocked, prominently displayed, and well-read; the music and conversation heard within our homes should benefit a Jewish home; and so on. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 751-753) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **DON'T BE QUICK TO JUDGE**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"And Hashem went down to see the city and the tower which the sons of man built..." (11:5)*

Did Hashem really need to "go down to see the city and the tower?" Surely, Hashem, as the All-Knowing Creator of the World, knew what was happening without having to "go down to see"?!

The Midrash (Tanchumah, Parshas Noach 18) answers that this comes to teach us that we should not come to conclusions about others or say anything about them unless we have first seen their wrongdoing and understood what brought them to do it (Rashi).

The length to which one must go to understand others was explained by the Belzer Rebbe as follows: "If you are facing a difficulty in the Rambam, what would you do? You'd spend all of your time and energy to try and understand it. This is no different: Here you have a difficulty regarding another Jew, you also need to spend all of your time and energy to understand him!"

Yet, looking favorably upon others - even when their actions appear questionable - not only benefits the other person, but perhaps even more so, it benefits us. The Gemara (Shabbos 127b) tells us that Hashem acts toward us in the same way that we act toward others. Based on this, the Chofetz Chaim (Sefer Shmiras Halashon, Shaar Hatevunah, chap. 4) paints an image of someone with seemingly many righteous deeds. However, were Hashem to scrutinize each one, He would find the mitzvos lacking, leaving the individual with very few merits.

On the other hand, the Chofetz Chaim then discusses someone who seems to have many sins. If Hashem wanted to look mercifully at these deeds, He would be able to find excuses for the individual's wrongdoing and find many merits in his actions. Therefore, explains the Chofetz Chaim, it is imperative for our sakes that we treat others with a merciful eye, because in turn, this is precisely how Hashem will treat us.

## **MIDDOS MAKETH THE MAN**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*"And Hashem dispersed them from there over the face of the whole earth..." (11:8)*

The Mikdash Mordechai asks why the punishment of the the generation of the flood was destruction, while the punishment for the generation that built the Tower of Bavel was more lenient and was just dispersion. After all, Rashi tells us that the sin of the Tower of Bavel was nothing less than a rebellion against Hashem Himself! If so, why are they given a lighter punishment than those of the flood, whose transgressions did not extend to direct conflict with Hashem?

The Mikdash Mordechai answers that the problem with the generation of the flood was one of *middos* - character traits; it was an era of wanton theft and extortion. When people have problems with their character traits, their bad ways can transfer down to the next generation. To avoid this, the first generation with such issues needs to be destroyed.

However, the problem with those involved in building the Tower of Bavel was not their character but their *deios* - their opinions and beliefs. Such a problem might not get handed down to the next generation, for the next generation may be able to work out for themselves that such opinions are wrong. The punishment for misguided opinion is dispersion, which gives the next generation time and space for introspection.

*Middos* become part of one's DNA and are quickly passed down in the genes, and thus they are difficult to change. Views, outlooks, and beliefs are more personal and do not necessarily follow on from one generation to another.

This is why Avraham Avinu instructed Eliezer not to take a wife for Yitzchak from the daughters of Canaan but instead to find him a wife from "ארצי ומוולדתי" - my land and my family."

What was the difference between the two places? The inhabitants of Aram, where Avraham Avinu sent Eliezer, were also idol worshippers! Why was he so insistent that Yitzchak not marry someone from Canaan?

The answer is that while the people from Aram displayed misguided beliefs and an incorrect outlook, the people in Canaan had problematic *middos*. While opinion can be changed, it is much harder to perfect bad *middos*, and Avraham Avinu did not want these to be handed down to his descendants.

Thus, the incorrect practices and *deios* of the generation of the Tower are punished with dispersion, while the bad *middos* of the generation of the flood need to be eradicated to avoid them being handed down to the next generation. (Derashos HaRan, Talelei Oros, p. 95)

## **DUTY-BOUND TO ALL**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"It was therefore named Bavel, because this was the place where G-d confused [balal] the whole world's language. From there, G-d dispersed them over all the earth." (11:9)*

Although the Generation of the Dispersion's punishment in this world was less severe than that of the Generation of the Flood, their punishment in the next world was more severe, for the Generation of the Flood was not excluded from the afterlife (see Sanhedrin 107b; Zohar 1:69a).

The reason is because the Generation of the Dispersion sinned against G-d but treated each other with love and friendship; therefore, their main punishment was spiritual. In contrast, the Generation of the Flood sinned against each other - stealing and fighting constantly; therefore, their main punishment was physical.

From a deeper perspective, sins against G-d are also sins against our fellow, since failure to fulfill the Torah's precepts prevents G-d's beneficence from coming into the world.

Similarly, sins against man are also sins against G-d, who commanded us to be good to each other. We should therefore take care to fulfill our duties both to G-d and to our fellow human beings, since only thus can we perfect the world and elicit G-d's blessings. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 754-755) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **HOLY STUBBORNNESS**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Terach lived seventy years and begot Avram, Nachor and Haran." (11:26)*

Avraham was one. (Yechezkel 33:24)

Avraham was "one" in the sense that he was alone in his quest for G-d. Though he was born into a family of idolaters and his entire generation consisted of idolaters, he sought G-d regardless of the opposition that he faced.

So too, whoever wishes to serve G-d must not fear the opposition that he encounters. Even if he faces difficulties from his parents, in-laws, spouse, friends, and so forth, he must continue seeking G-d until, like Avraham, he will come to Him. (See Likutey Moharan II, Preface)

## **EMULATING AVRAHAM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"[Avram's family] came as far as Charan, and they settled there..." (11:31)*

The word Charan means "anger." Allegorically, then, this verse implies that Avraham was able to appease G-d's anger. Although humanity continued to rebel against G-d after the Flood, Avraham - unlike Noach - prayed for his contemporaries and befriended them, working to improve their beliefs and behavior. G-d therefore was merciful to them.

Similarly, the accomplishments and suffering of preceding generations have prepared the world for the coming Messianic Era, when the purpose of all of creation will be realized (Tanya, chapter 36). Having gone through enough "floods" throughout history, our remaining task is to emulate Avraham, lovingly befriending all people and awakening their innate connection to G-d. In this way, we can guide the world toward its ultimate purpose: the true and complete Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 756-757; *ibid.*, vol. 15, pp. 70-74) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **PERPETUATING OUR VALUES**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"The days of Terach were two hundred and five years, and Terach died in Charan." (11:32)*

The Torah tells us that Terach (Avram's father) lived two hundred and five years and died in Charan (11:32), a detail (his death) not often conveyed, and in the word Charan, the letter "nun" is inverted. Rashi explains that, until that time, the wrath of G-d ("*charon af*") was present in the world and reversed during Avram's time and Charan's death. What abated G-d's wrath?

Rav Moshe Feinstein submits that while some recognized G-d and even kept the seven Noachide laws, they were not confident enough to transmit those traditions and values to their children or others. Avraham, however, not only taught Torah to his children and followers but instructed them to "keep the way of G-d, doing charity and justice" (18:19). The commitment to perpetuate Torah values displayed the reverence necessary for our survival. Similarly, sharing our love for Torah and its ethics with our friends and family ensures the successful transmission of our core values.

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