

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

JEWISH ECOLOGY

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

The Rosh Yeshiva’s wife had to make a decision. Her dining room suite was on its last legs. An investigation was made. It would cost almost exactly the same amount of money to repair the old suite as it would to replace it with an identical new one. Obviously she would want to have a new suite, rather than an old one that had been patched up, however good the repair...

Obviously. However, without a moment’s hesitation she decided to have the old suite repaired. One of the *talmidim* asked her why she didn’t prefer to have a new suite.

She replied: “Around this table sat many of the great Torah sages of Europe at one time or another. When they came to Baltimore, they would always stay with us. It was at this table that *Reb Chaim Ozer* learned Torah, that *Reb Boruch Ber* ate *gefilte* fish on Shabbos. It was on this chair that *Reb Elchonon Wasserman* sat...”

When we think of ecology, we tend to think of our physical impact on Nature. However, our spirituality and our morality also impact the ecosystem.

Two identical tables come off the factory assembly line. One table finds its way to a bar. One to a Yeshiva. The table in the bar is not the same table as the one in the Yeshiva. The table in the Yeshiva,

supporting holy books and thoughts, different table. Not metaphorically — but in reality. Its very essence is altered and uplifted.

Such is the power given over to man: We can alter the very structure of the world.

We can destroy the world by polluting it with immorality. Or we can raise ourselves and the world with us to the heavens.

• Based on *Mesillas Yesarim* and a story heard from *Rabbi Naftali Kaplan*

“When we think of ecology, we tend to think of our physical impact on Nature. However, our spirituality and our morality also impact the ecosystem.”

PROGENY OF LOVE

“These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous man.” (6:9)

The essential offspring of a person are his righteous acts.

Just as a person nurtures and cares for his offspring, sparing no love or effort to perfect them, likewise one should behave toward one’s good deeds. One should lavish love to perfect even the least promising of them, as one would do with one’s children, for no-one considers even the least of one’s children insignificant.

• *Rabbi Moshe Feinstein*

THE TASTE OF FREEDOM

“The dove came back to him in the evening — and behold, it had plucked an olive leaf with its beak.” (8:11)

By bringing back a bitter olive leaf in its mouth, it was as if the dove was saying to Noah “Better that my food be bitter and from the Hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, than sweet as honey, and from the hand of man” (*Rashi*).

During its stay in the ark, the dove had been obliged to rely on Noah for food in order to survive. It brought back a bitter olive leaf — which it would not normally eat — to express an idea that our Sages teach: The most bitter food eaten in freedom is sweeter than the sweetest food eaten in captivity.

• *Rabbi S.R. Hirsch*

WHAT’S IN A WORD

“Then Hashem said to Noah, ‘Come into the ark, you and all your household’...” (7:1)

The word in Hebrew for ark is **Teiva**, which also means **word**.

Throughout the history of the Jewish People, both in times of oppression and assimilation, our only refuge has been to “**Come into the Teiva**”; to come into the “**word**”.

That word is the word of prayer uttered from a contrite heart; that word is the word of the Torah, which has proved itself to be a “Noah’s ark” for *all our household* throughout all of history.

• *Ba’al Shem Tov*

STRIPES FOREVER

Aaron Goldman
<agoldman1@juno.com>

wrote:

I enjoy your postings immensely. Could you please tell me the reason for stripes on a tallit? I imagine that not having them would not disqualify the tallit but how did the black stripes come about? I know that the Sefardim have white stripes on their Tallit — and modern ones have different colors. But I am interested in the traditional ones. Thank you very much.

Saul <SBEHR@MCKQ.CO.ZA>
wrote:

*Here's a poser:
Why do taleisim have stripes?
Regards*

Ruth Marcus from Hyde Park
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Why don't **cotton** tzitzit have stripes?

Dear Aaron, Saul, and Ruth,

The stripes on the tallit remind us of the 'strand of techelet' once worn as part of the tzitzit.

Techelet is sky-blue wool. It is dyed with a special dye made from the blood of a fish/snail called the *chilazon*. The Torah says that if we wear a four-cornered garment, we should put strings on the corners, and one of these strings should be a 'strand of techelet.'

Over the centuries, the exact identity of the *chilazon* became forgotten. Hence, the 'strand of techelet' became a mitzva we are unable to fulfill (according to most authorities).

The idea behind *tzitzit* is that they serve as a reminder. Like royal subjects who wear special insignias to symbolize their loyalty to the king, we wear *tzitzit* to remind us of our duty to Hashem and His commandments. The beautiful blue reminds us of the sky, which in turn inspires us to ponder Hashem's greatness. Now that we no longer have *techelet*, we have the stripe on the *tallit* to remind us of the *techelet*.

Some people used to have a blue stripe. I don't know why ours is black.

It makes sense that only a woolen *tallit* has stripes, since *techelet* is made from wool.

According to some authorities, the *tallit* should be the same color as the *tzitzit* — white. That would explain the Sefardic custom to have white stripes.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 9:4*
- *Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav 9:6*
- *Ta'amei Haminhagim 15*

RAVEN MAVEN

Kalman Estrin <estrinkm@cadvision.com> wrote:

In a conversation a few months ago, a friend raised the following ques-

tion. The RAVEN is specifically identified in the story of Noah as the first bird that Noah sends out in search of land. The Raven is also given special prominence in the dietary laws concerning which birds are clean and which are not. Is there a special significance and symbolism connected to the raven?

Dear Kalman Estrin,

Noah sent the raven to find out the state of the world. Since the raven is a bird of prey, it would return with carrion of man or beast if the water had abated to that degree. The raven failed, however, flying back and forth time after time.

Why did Noah send a raven specifically? According to the Talmud, Hashem forbade procreation on the Ark, but the raven violated this prohibition. Therefore, Noah reasoned that of all the birds, the raven was the safest one to send out on this dangerous mission. That way, if the raven didn't survive it wouldn't mean the extinction of its species.

Also, the ancients considered the raven a portent of the future. They would build special cages where the priests would study the motions and flying formations of the ravens. They interpreted these movements as divinations of the future. In this sense, the raven's mission was successful, since Noah could discern from the raven's flying patterns something about the future.

Also, the raven reminds us of Hashem's kindness to even the most helpless of creatures. How? Ravens are cruel to their young, leaving them to die of starvation. But Hashem has mercy on them, and provides them with insects to eat. Thus, sending the raven may have been Noah's way of asking Hashem "Please provide for us, just as you provide for the poor helpless young ravens."

Sources:

- *Tractate Sanhedrin 108b*
- *Tractate Ketubot 49b*
- *Malbim*

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Parsha Q&A ?

1. What are the 'offspring' of righteous people?
2. How did Man corrupt the Earth?
3. What sin sealed the fate of the Flood Generation?
4. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, instead of saving him some other way?
5. How was the Ark's roof shaped? Why?
6. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the Flood for seven days?
7. How high did the waters of the Flood rise?
8. Which creatures escaped the Flood without the aid of the Ark?
9. After the flood, some of the springs were left opened. Which?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the Flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. How many seasons are mentioned in the Torah?
14. What was permitted to Noach that was forbidden to Adam? What exceptions are there to this permission?
15. Why does the command to "be fruitful and multiply" follow directly after the prohibition of murder?
16. With which mitzvah were Shem's descendants rewarded, due to his act of covering his father?
17. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
18. Why did Ashur leave the land of Shinar?
19. Why was the punishment for building the Tower of Babel less severe than the punishment of the Flood generation?
20. Why was Sarah called *Yiscah*?

BONUS QUESTION?

Verse 11:1 says "The whole earth had one language...." Previous verses, however, indicate there were already different languages (e.g., 10:31). How can this be?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The Rainbow symbolizes the idea that the world deserves destruction, but Hashem 'holds back' due to His promise to Noach. The rainbow's shape hints to this idea, since it is like an archer's bow. This symbolizes that the world deserves to be devastated as though by an armed warrior. However, the bow of the rainbow points upwards, away from the earth. This is as though the archer is pointing the bow **away** from his victim, symbolizing that Hashem will not destroy the world.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

On Tisha B'Av morning, everyone sits on the floor as a sign of mourning. However, one person in every synagogue publicly sits down on a chair. Who is this person?

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• CHULLIN 54 - 60

Weekly Daf

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE AND ELIMINATING THE NEGATIVE

A fowl which has been bitten on the head by a small animal is likely to have its brain punctured and rendered a *treifa*. There are tests which can be made to determine whether this indeed happened. Passing a needle over the skull to see if it will get caught in a hole is a more precise manner of examination than an alternative suggested by one of the sages, but it runs the risk of sometimes creating a hole which did not exist before.

“How long will you destroy the money of Jews?” is the challenge which is hurled at the champion of the needle test.

“How long will you cause Jews to eat *treifa* meat?” is the response of the stringent examiner.

This dialogue echoes the debate (*Chullin* 49b) between the sage Rava and Rabbi Papa concerning the status of an animal whose intestinal puncture had been sealed by forbidden fat. While Rava raises the issue of concern for Jewish money, Rabbi Papa counters with the concern for not violating Torah law against eating *treifa* meat.

In his commentary on the Talmud, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos points out the difference between the stringent position taken by the aforementioned sages with disregard to “Jewish money” and the attitude we find in *Mesechta Rosh Hashana* and in *Mesechta Yoma* of refraining from the use of gold in adorning the *shofar* used on fast days and the ballot box used in drawing lots for scapegoat on Yom Kippur on the grounds that “the Torah had consideration for Jewish money.” In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 656 the ruling is that while a Jew is obligated to sacrifice all his money in order to avoid transgressing a negative command, he is not obligated to give up more than a fifth of his resources in order to fulfill a positive one. When it comes to the positive performance involved in *shofar* and scapegoat lottery there is a consideration for Jewish money. But when the

issue is a possible violation of the Torah ban on eating *treifa* meat the outcry is “How long will you cause Jews to eat *treifa*?”

• *Chullin* 56a

EXPERIMENTATION OR INSPIRATION?

Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was known as a great experimenter. One of his experiments focused on King Solomon’s description (*Mishlei* 6:7) of the ant as an industrious creature preparing its provisions for the winter, despite the fact that it has no ruler to discipline and direct it.

How did Solomon know that the ants have no king? wondered the sage.

“Enraged by what they assumed had been a deliberate deception, the ants pounced upon the suspected liar and killed him.”

The experiment he conducted was based on his knowledge that ants will come out of their hole in large numbers only when there is shade. He therefore spread a garment over an ant hole on a hot summer day. One ant appeared, and Rabbi Shimon marked him for further identification. This ant returned to his hole with a report that there was shade, but when the entire colony came out the sage removed the garment, flooding the area with sunlight. Enraged by what they assumed had been a deliberate deception, the ants pounced upon the suspected liar and killed him.

This is how Solomon knew the ants have no ruler, concluded Rabbi Shimon, for if they had a king they would have brought the offending ant before him for judgment and not exercised mob rule.

Another sage challenged the valid-

ity of this experiment. Perhaps the king was with them and gave the execution order? Or perhaps there was a standing order to execute all deceivers? Or maybe the king had died and until a new one was appointed the anarchy of mob rule prevailed? This challenger concludes that there is no scientific way to establish that ants have no king and Solomon knew this only because of Divine inspiration.

But it is Rabbi Shimon’s interest in scientifically demonstrating Solomon’s knowledge of ant society which raises a problem. There is a story told (*Bava Basra* 75a) of a student who snickered skeptically when he heard Rabbi Yochanan relate a tradition that in the hereafter the gates of Jerusalem would be formed from massive slabs of rare precious jewels. On a sea journey, this student had a vision of angels sawing away at massive slabs of such jewels, and heard from them that they were preparing the future gates of Jerusalem. When he returned to Rabbi Yochanan and reported his confirmation of what the master had taught, he received a sharp rebuke:

“Worthless one! Had you not seen it for yourself you would have not believed what I taught. You are guilty of disrespect for the Sages!” (The offending student was reduced to a pile of bones!)

Why was this student’s skepticism such a serious offense, and Rabbi Shimon’s passion for experimentation legitimate?

Rabbi Shimon, explains Tosefos, never doubted the words of Solomon as did the student of Rabbi Yochanan. He merely wished to establish whether his knowledge of ant society was the product of natural human intelligence employing scientific experimentation or the supernatural gift of Divine inspiration. While his own conclusion was that Solomon had made an experiment similar to his own, the challenges presented by the other sage led to an opposing conclusion that it could only have been the result of Divine inspiration.

• *Chullin* 57b

PARSHA OVERVIEW

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man, Adam *HaRishon*. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants except for Noach, the sole righteous man of his era, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the earth. Hashem instructs Noach to build an Ark in which to escape the Flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days, the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the Ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends forth first a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later, Noach again sends out the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive branch in its beak. After seven more days, Noach once again sends forth the dove, which this time does not return. Hashem then tells Noach and his family to leave the Ark. Noach brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried for this purpose in the Ark.

Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws; the prohibitions against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating the meat of a living animal, and the institution of a legal system. The world's climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach's sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafes, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Ham is cursed to be a slave to slaves. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach's three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in Hashem fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

HAFTORAH: ISAIAH 54:1-55:5

Just as in the Parsha this week, where Hashem promises never to bring another flood to destroy the world, so too the Haftorah carries Hashem's promise never to exile the Jewish People after the redemption from the current Exile of Edom.

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

Similarly, the destruction of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, and the dispersal of the Jewish People was like a "flood", which superficially seemed like a total disaster.

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

JEWISH DIETETICS

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

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

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

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

The *Midrashim* of the Torah are like milk and honey: They are sweet and nourishing, instilling love and fear of Hashem.

• *Tiferes Zion*

SING MY SOUL INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

*ASKINU SEUDASA D'MEHEIMENUSA
"I PREPARE A FEAST OF FAITH..."*

The Shabbos meal is indeed a feast of faith, says the *Sfas Emes*, because the very eating is a source of nourishment for a Jew's faith in Hashem.

This is consistent with the idea suggested by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev in regard to the Torah passage: "You shall observe the Shabbos because it is sacred for yourselves" (Shmos 31:14). In regard to the

Festivals the rule is that we divide the day — "Half for Hashem and half for yourselves." In regard to Shabbos, however, even the eating and drinking which is "for yourselves" is also considered sacred.

Parsha Q&A

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 6:9 - Their good deeds.
2. 6:1 - Through promiscuity and idolatry.
3. 6:13 - Theft.
4. 6:14 - So people would see him building the ark, find out about the impending flood, and possibly repent.
5. 6:15 - The roof slanted downward from the middle, so that water would run off on both sides.
6. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
7. 7:20 - Fifteen *amos* above the mountain tops.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:2 - The useful ones, such as the hot springs of Tiberias.
10. 8:11 - That it's better to eat food 'bitter like an olive' which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 8:22 - Six.
14. 9:3,4 - Eating meat, except for limbs or blood taken from a live animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:23 - The mitzva of *tzitzis*.
17. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, convincing them to rebel against Hashem.
18. 10:11 - He saw his children were being influenced by the wicked Nimrod.
19. 11:9 - Because the people in the time of the Tower of Babel were unified, they acted with love and friendship towards one another.
20. 11:29 - The word '*yisrah*' is related to the Hebrew word 'to see.' Sarah was called Yisrah because she could 'see' the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

BONUS ANSWER!

Everyone knew the original language, *Lashon Hakodesh*. In addition, various families began developing different languages. Hashem 'mixed up' their languages at the Tower of Babel by causing them to forget *Lashon Hakodesh*.

• Malbim

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 6:19 Miracle of the Ark
- 7:1 Preserving the World
- 8:11 The Olive Leaf
- 9:12 The Rainbow
- 9:18 Cham and Canaan
- 10:9 Nimrod
- 10:15 The Land of Canaan

- 11:32 The Death of Terach

SFORNO

- 8:21 The New World
- 8:22 The Pre-Flood World
- 9:6 The Crime of Murder
- 9:9 The Conditions of the Covenant
- 9:13 Meaning of the Rainbow

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