

Parshas Noach

For the week ending 4 Cheshvan 5756
27 & 28 October 1995

Summary

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man, Adam HaRishon. Adam's descendents 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 in the Ark which were carried for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws; the prohibition of idolatry, categories of forbidden sexual relations, 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 that the descendants of his son Canaan would be the lowest of slaves. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach's three sons from whom are descended the seventy nations of the world. 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.

Just as water, wine and milk keep best in plain inexpensive containers, so Torah stays with one who is humble.

Commentaries

"Noach was a righteous man — upright in his generation" (6:9).

'There are those who say that the Torah is praising Noach here, and there are those who say it is denigrating him — that Noach was righteous only *in comparison to the rest of his generation*, but if he had lived in the time of Avraham Avinu, nobody would have thought anything of him.' (Rashi)

If the Torah itself praises Noach, why would one think to imply that it is belittling him?

Really, the idea is this: Noach recognized the depravity of his generation so clearly that he stinted no effort to distance himself from it in every possible way. Thus, he made himself into a *tzadik*. In the time of Avraham Avinu, however, there would have been no such motivation, since the people were on a much higher spiritual level. Consequently Noach would not have made the effort to perfect himself.

(Adapted from Rabbi Yoizil Horowitz)

"And G-d said to Noach ...Behold I am going to destroy the world..." (6:13).

Hashem first tells Noach that He is going to destroy all life, but doesn't tell him that it will be by a Flood. Then Hashem instructs Noach to build an Ark, and only after that does Hashem inform Noach that He is going to flood the world. Why did Hashem wait to tell Noach that He was going to destroy the world with water until *after* He had commanded the building of the Ark?

The obvious answer is that Hashem wanted Noach to build the Ark to fulfill His command, and not for his own rescue. For, without knowing that a Flood was the chosen method of destruction, Noach could equally well have built himself a deep earth trench as a fallout shelter against lethal solar radiation. From this we can learn a lesson for all *mitzvos* — we should do them purely because they are the will of Hashem, even if we think we may know the reason...

(Adapted from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein)

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-810-315

fax: 972-2-812-890

ohr@jer1.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8 floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

avram.rothman@canrem.com

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

The prophet *Yeshayahu* (Isaiah) refers to the Flood as the ‘waters of Noach’, implying that Noach bears at least partial responsibility for the Flood. For, if Noach had taught his generation to know Hashem by instructing them to emulate Hashem’s *middos* (character traits), they surely would have repented.

The Rambam (Maimonides) once had a dispute with a philosopher whether instinct or behavioral training governs the behavior of an animal. The philosopher held that an animal can be trained so completely that it can be made to do almost anything. To prove his point, he painstakingly trained a number of cats to stand upright, balance trays on their paws and serve as waiters. He dressed them for the part in white shirts with little black bow-ties, and conducted a banquet with the cats as the waiters. As these feline waiters were serving the soup, The Rambam, who had been invited to the banquet, released a mouse... The banquet room was turned to pandemonium as the cats, forgetting all their hundreds of hours of training, let their trays crash to the ground, rushing about on all fours after the mouse.

Without training, a person’s baser instincts and desires will drag him onto all fours. However, the human being is distinct from the animals by virtue of his ability to perfect his *middos* so that they control his baser instincts. One who has not yet worked on perfecting his *middos* will, like the trained cat, be able to put on a show of discipline for a time, but only so long as no ‘mice’ are released in his path... Only after a person has acquired good character traits, will the Torah reside in him, for even though only Torah can bring one’s *middos* to ultimate perfection, where there is no foundation of proper *middos*, the acquisition of Torah is impossible.

(Adapted from Shiurei Binah — Rabbi Zev Leff)

Haftorah:

Yeshayahu 54:1-55:5

“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)

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Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Eishes Chayil - Kj `at

“A Woman of Valor...”

The 22 concluding passages of King Solomon’s Proverbs serve as a tribute to Hashem and his Torah on one level and on another level to the Shabbos and the Jewish woman who prepares the home for it. The simple and allegorical implications of “woman” used by Solomon find expression in the Talmudic interpretation of the passage: “He who has found a woman has found good” (Proverbs 18:22). If this is a literal reference to woman, say our Sages, see how good is the good woman that even Scripture praises her. If this is an allegorical reference to Torah, concludes the Sage Rava, see how good the good woman is that she has been chosen to serve as an allegory for Torah itself. In similar fashion we say these Biblical verses, each beginning with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, as a tribute to all the divine dimensions of the holy day we have just begun to enjoy and to the Jewish wife and mother whose accomplishments form the canvas on which our song of praise is painted.

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