



פרשת נח Parshat Noach

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A LONG ROAD MRS. MICHAL ZISQUIT

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ARIELLA GROSS ('21)

ALIZA BILLET ('21)

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

MORDECHAI SHEKHTER ('20)

Generally when we think of Parshat Noach, we tend to focus on the story of Noach and the *teiva*. However, there are three separate stories in this week's parsha that span over a millennium! The parsha

begins with the story of Noach saving humanity and all of the animals from being swept away by the flood. The second story happens centuries later, when mankind becomes wicked yet again and decides to work together to rebel against God. Finally, at the very end of the parsha we are introduced to Avraham and Sarah.

The amount of time that Parshat Noach spans is in stark contrast to the amount of time the rest of Sefer Bereishit spans. The remaining ten parshiot go into full detail about only 4 generations. Additionally, we know that Avraham is the main character for the next couple

of parshiot; why then does he have to “steal” space from Parshat Noach and be introduced to us this week? In short, how do these three separate stories relate to one another?

At the beginning of the parsha, Rashi compares Noach to Avraham and, despite the fact that the Torah calls Noach a *tzadik*, he doesn't quite measure up. After spending a century building the *teiva*, you would expect Noach to influence some of his neighbors either to repent or to join him, but we see that it is only Noach and his family that make it on to the *teiva*. Avraham, on the other hand, had throngs of followers.

Not only is Avraham contrasted with Noach, but the Yalcut Shimoni links the Tower of Bavel to Avraham as well. Since Avraham stayed out of the tower building, God gave him the gift of intuitively understanding Torah. It is the tower that sets them apart. Avraham is their counterpoint.

Rav Pinkus says the *Dor Haflaga* -- Generation of Dispersion -- tried to take God out of the equation. They tried to work together and assume that they had the answers to everything, and they left God out of the plan. The *Dor Haflaga* was disinterested. They didn't want

God. Noach, as well, was unsuccessful at recruiting his peers, and Rashi notes that he was not a complete believer in Hashem's plan.

Avraham, however, spread monotheism, he found Hashem and recruited others to find Him as well. When the world was ignoring God, Avraham was bringing Him into his life and into the lives of all of his followers.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer notes that it is impossible to convince others if you yourself are not convinced. Avraham was the antidote to both *Dor Hamabul* and *Dor Haflagah* because of his full-fledged emunah in Hashem. He is the success story after 20 generations of failure.

MORAL FOUNDATION

ARIELLA GROSS ('21)

Many people view reward and punishment as a fairly straightforward system: a good deed grants a reward and a bad deed results in a consequence. But what exactly classifies an action as “righteous” or “wicked?” How can we determine what is “good” or “bad?”

For Bnei Yisrael, the answer is simple: the Torah. Hashem, the all-knowing God of justice, gave us the Torah and halacha to steer us in the right direction. But before the Torah was given and laws were codified, how could people know what was moral and what was not? Even without a system of laws in place, people were still judged for their actions. For example, in this week's parsha, the pasuk states:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים לְנֹחַ כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי מְלֵאָה
הָאָרֶץ חַמָּס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מְשַׁחֲתֶתְם אֶת הָאָרֶץ

“God said to Noach, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth (Bereishit 6:13).

But, how can the earth be “filled with lawlessness” if the Torah had not yet been given? Is it fair to judge people for breaking laws they did not know existed? These questions boil down to a much larger debate: where exactly does morality come from? Are ethics derived directly from the Torah or is there something innate in humans that predisposes them to it?

The argument for Torah-given morality is based on the idea that its guidelines have permeated into countless other cultures and religions around the world. Stances against murder, theft, and jealousy alongside the promotion of honesty and respect have become so widespread that they are now commonly considered

essential to morality.

However, Sefer Bereishit refutes this idea by providing a concrete example of pre-Torah morality. After confronting Avraham, Avimelech states:

וַיִּמָּה חֲטָאתִי לָךְ, כִּי הִבֵּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל-מַמְלַכְתִּי,
חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה מֵעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲשׂוּ, עֲשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי

“What wrong have I done that you should bring great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done” (Bereishit 20:9).

Avimelech implies that despite the absence of Torah from the world, there is still some code of right and wrong. Furthermore, Rabbi Yochanan asserts that, “even if the Torah had not been given, we would nonetheless have learned modesty from the cat, which covers its excrement, and that stealing is objectionable from the ant, which does not take grain from another ant, and forbidden relations from the dove, which is faithful to its partner...” (Eiruvim 100b).

He illustrates how ethics are inherent in nature and therefore must be something God ingrained in the Earth. This bolsters the claim that morality is not something given to us through the Torah, but is actually found in every one of us. Hashem created human beings *b'tzelem elokim*, in the image of God, to instill in us a sense of right and wrong. While the Torah provides more clear guidelines for us, we still have an intrinsic ability to determine good and bad. Therefore, the generation of the flood was not punished for ignorance to an established law system, but for disregarding their internal sense of morality -- their *tzelem elokim*.

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

ALIZA BILLET ('21)

The first major story in Parshat Noach after the flood is that of Migdal Bavel, the Tower of Babel. A group of people build a huge tower in a city to make a name for themselves and to not become lost in the world. This “angers” Hashem, so He causes them to speak different languages and disperses them across the planet so that they can no longer communicate with each other.

Through the flood, Hashem destroyed humanity because they were incapable of working together and coexisting civilly. Now that the flood is over, why is Hashem upset that people are working as a team?

The commentaries offer various answers. Rashi and others say that the people of Migdal Bavel were building a tower to fight against Hashem or to use for idolatrous purposes. Even though they had amazing unity, they had to be stopped because they were going

against God.

The Ohr HaChaim raises some questions about this explanation. First, he writes, if the builders of the tower were truly aiming to overthrow God, banishing them to different places on Earth doesn't seem like the most adequate punishment. Splitting them up from their peers won't cure them of their heresy. In their new lands, they will continue to challenge God with the people whom they befriend there. The Ohr Hachaim continues to challenge Rashi by asking why God would get mad at them for creating a civilization. What else does He expect people to do now that the flood has passed? Unlike the generation of the flood who tried to kill each other, this generation is seemingly trying to advance the world by developing a society.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that God wanted the world to be split into thirds: one-third to be settled by people, one-third for wilderness and desert, and one-third for oceanic purposes. By concentrating themselves in the city of Bavel, the people are taking over far less than one-third of the land. As a result, they are going against God's direct plan for settling the earth.

By dispersing humanity throughout the world and with multiple languages, Hashem ensures that the world will be settled according to His plan and not according to their plan, without directly forcing people to develop the land. After the people are dispersed, they still have the option to settle wherever they want and with whomever they want. It is just easiest to stick with people who share their language, which is why different cultures developed throughout the world.

According to the Ohr HaChaim, the problem with the unity of the people of Migdal Bavel is that the earth had not yet been populated so it was not the right time and place for them to come together. Today, the world is settled the way God intended, with humanity flourishing across the globe, not just in one populous city. We now live at the right time and in the right place to focus on unity and should aim to work together to develop and protect our society and culture.

PRECIOUS WORDS

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Noach, we see the story of Noach and the flood, and later the tower of Bavel. Both of these events revolve around speech or the absence of it. With Noach and the *teiva* we see what the absence of speech can do. Hashem teaches Noach exactly how to build the ark, which family to bring on it,

and which animals to bring on it. Noach does exactly as he's commanded again and again as it says

וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹקִים כִּן עָשָׂה

“And Noach did all that Hashem had commanded him, he did so” (Bereishit 6:22).

But we never see Noach speak throughout this whole episode. The Rabbis criticize Noach for not speaking out and warning the world about what was coming if they didn't repent. Instead, he just kept quiet when the people needed someone to wake them up from their wickedness and return to Hashem.

On the flip side, the Tower of Bavel shows the misuse of language. Everybody on Earth spoke the same language and used it in a detrimental way. They banded together to build a tower going as high as the heavens to make a name for themselves, as it says in the pasuk:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה-לָנוּ עִיר, וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם,

וְנַעֲשֶׂה-לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן-נִפְּוֵץ, עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ

“And they said, ‘Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world’” (Bereishit 11:4).

Hashem therefore decides that the people of Bavel do not deserve to speak the same tongue, because they do not use their words in the correct way.

Through this parsha, the preciousness of speech is displayed. One's words hold an enormous amount of power, and with it comes great responsibility. It's difficult to know when to speak up or when to stay silent, so we must look to Hashem for guidance. Right after the devastating flood that wiped out the Jewish people, Hashem blessed Noach and his sons, demonstrating how words can be used for good. Words can be used to damage, or they can be used to bolster and bless others, as Hashem does. Have a wonderful Shabbos.

TZADIK?!

MORDECHAI SHEKHTER ('20)

יִבֵּא נֹחַ וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי בְנָיו אִתּוֹ אֵל

הַתְּבֵה מִפְּנֵי מִי הַמַּבּוּל

Rashi comments on the last three words of this pasuk (Bereshit 7:7), *מִפְּנֵי מִי הַמַּבּוּל*, that these words teach us that Noach had to literally be pushed into the *teiva*, because he was unsure that there was actually going to be a *mabul*. Therefore, Rashi places Noach into the category of *קטני אמונה*, those lacking essential faith. This comment is seemingly troublesome, because earlier in the parsha (6:9) we are told,

אֵת הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלַּךְ נֹחַ

Meaning that Noach “walked” with Hashem, meaning that he followed Hashem’s will. However, Rashi on that pasuk states a difference between the language used here and the language, התהלכתי לפניו -- “...before whom I walk” (24:40) used regarding Avraham Avinu. From this difference, Rashi concludes that while Avraham Avinu was strong enough in his emunah to “walk” by himself, Noach still needed a support and could not “walk” by himself. Although at first glance we see that Noach is a tzaddik in his generation, Rashi is consistent in how he paints a tainted picture of Noach’s emunah. The Chizkuni furthers Rashi’s point by saying that Noach went into the *teiva*, מפני מי המבול, because of the waters of the flood, and not because of Hashem’s commandment to go into the *teiva*.

According to the Radak, the words מפני מי המבול should be interpreted that Noach went into the *teiva* before the waters of the flood came. The Radak disagrees with Rashi, and brings proof that the Torah testifies that Noach was a צדיק תמים, a perfect tzaddik, and did all that Hashem commanded him.

The Netziv writes that the reason the pasuk finishes with מפני מי המבול was to distinguish Noach and his family from the animals who were going to be on the boat with them. Noach and his family knew why they were going into the *teiva* -- Hashem told them there was going to be a flood, whereas the animals were just collected and brought into the *teiva* without knowledge of a flood. As is evident from the Netziv, the fact that Noach went into the *teiva* מפני מי המבול, was noble and that it proves he had emunah that there was going to be a flood.

Rav Moshe Feinstein ז”ל asks a question according to the view that Noach only went into the *teiva* when he saw the rain. What was the big deal about not going into the *teiva* until it started raining, that according to Rashi and others he should be categorized as lacking in *emunah*? Rav Moshe answers that the reason is that Noach should have realized that Hashem gave him a mitzvah to do and he should have run to do it, as opposed to waiting around until he was forced to. Yet, Rav Moshe assures, Noach did teshuva when leaving the *teiva*. Noach remained in the *teiva* until Hashem gave him the commandment to leave. From this we see that Noach realized the greatness of a commandment from Hashem and reclaimed his status as a tzaddik.

Perhaps the conflict between the two opinions on Noach’s righteousness can be synthesized using the idea of Rav Moshe Feinstein ז”ל. Before Noach went into the *teiva*, he was in the category of people with little or no *emunah*. Nonetheless, when Noach left the *teiva*, after he had seen all the miracles that the Creator of the world had done for him, he was considered a tzaddik that walked beside Hashem wholeheartedly.



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