



Parshas Noach

For the week ending 6 Cheshvan 5757
18 & 19 October 1996

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 in the Ark 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 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.

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 *gefille* fish on Shabbos. It was on this chair that the *Chafetz Chaim* 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 ecosphere.**

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, is a 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 eco-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 Yesharim and a story heard from Rabbi Naftali Kaplan

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

ohr@virtual.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

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

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for Torah Weekly — Please contact us for details.

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

PROGENY OF LOVE

“These are the offspring of Noach — Noach 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 Noach *“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 Noach 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 Noach, ‘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)

Haftarah: 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 Haftarah 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)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

ASKINU SEUDASA - *t` sugx ubhe` t`*
“I PREPARE A FEAST...”

I prepare a feast of faith אתקינ סעודתא דמהימנותא Askinu Seudasa D'Meheimenusa

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 Berditchev 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.

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General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

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