

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I once had the opportunity to ask the Catholic writer Paul Johnson what had struck him most about Judaism during the long period he spent researching it for his masterly *A History of the Jews*? He replied in roughly these words:

"There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasised the individual- like the secular West today. And there have been others that placed weight on the collective-communist Russia or China, for example."

Judaism, he continued, was the most successful example he knew of that managed the delicate balance between both-giving equal weight to individual and collective responsibility. Judaism was a religion of strong individuals and strong communities. This, he said, was very rare and difficult, and constituted one of our greatest achievements.

It was a wise and subtle observation. Without knowing it, he had in effect paraphrased Hillel's aphorism: "If I am not for myself, who will be (individual responsibility)? But if I am only for myself, what am I (collective responsibility)?" This insight allows us to see the argument of Parshat Noach in a way that might not have been obvious otherwise.

The parsha begins and ends with two great events, the Flood on the one hand, Babel and its tower on the other. On the face of it they have nothing in common. The failings of the generation of the Flood are explicit. "The world was corrupt before G-d, and the land was filled with violence. G-d saw the world, and it was corrupted. All flesh had perverted its way on the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12). Wickedness, violence, corruption, perversion: this is the language of systemic moral failure.

Babel by contrast seems almost idyllic. "The entire earth had one language and a common speech" (11:1). The builders are bent on construction, not destruction. It is far from clear what their sin was. Yet from the Torah's point of view Babel represents another serious wrong turn, because immediately thereafter G-d summons Abraham to begin an entirely new chapter in the religious story of humankind. There is no Flood-G-d had, in any case, sworn that He would never again punish humanity in such a way ("Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's

heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have just done", 8:21). But it is clear that after Babel G-d comes to the conclusion that there must be another and different way for humans to live.

Both the Flood and the Tower of Babel are rooted in actual historical events, even if the narrative is not couched in the language of descriptive history. Mesopotamia had many flood myths, all of which testify to the memory of disastrous inundations, especially on the flat lands of the Tigris-Euphrates valley (See Commentary of R. David Zvi Hoffman to Genesis 6 [Hebrew, 140] who suggests that the Flood may have been limited to centres of human habitation, rather than covering the whole earth). Excavations at Shuruppak, Kish, Uruk and Ur-Abraham's birthplace-reveal evidence of clay flood deposits. Likewise the Tower of Babel was a historical reality. Herodotus tells of the sacred enclosure of Babylon, at the centre of which was a ziqqurat or tower of seven stories, 300 feet high. The remains of more than thirty such towers have been discovered, mainly in lower Mesopotamia, and many references have been found in the literature of the time that speak of such towers "reaching heaven."

However, the stories of the Flood and Babel are not merely historical, because the Torah is not history but "teaching, instruction." They are there because they represent a profound moral-social-political-spiritual truth about the human situation as the Torah sees it. They represent, respectively, precisely the failures intimated by Paul Johnson. The Flood tells us what happens to civilization when individuals rule and there is no collective. Babel tells us what happens when the collective rules and individuals are sacrificed to it.

It was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), the thinker who laid the foundations of modern politics in his classic *Leviathan* (1651), who-without referring to the Flood-gave it its best interpretation. Before there were political institutions, said Hobbes, human beings were in a "state of nature." They were individuals, packs, bands. Lacking a stable ruler, an effective government and enforceable laws, people would be in a state of permanent and violent chaos-"a war of every man against every man"-as they competed for scarce resources. There would be "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Such situations exist today in a whole series of failed or failing states. That is precisely the Torah's description of life before the Flood.

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When there is no rule of law to constrain individuals, the world is filled with violence.

Babel is the opposite, and we now have important historical evidence as to exactly what was meant by the sentence, "The entire land had one language and a common speech." This may not refer to primal humanity before the division of languages. In fact in the previous chapter the Torah has already stated, "From these the maritime peoples spread out into their lands in their clans within their nations, each with its own language" (Gen. 10:50. The Talmud Yerushalmi, Megillah 1:11, 71b, records a dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Johanan, one of whom holds that the division of humanity into seventy languages occurred before the Flood).

The reference seems to be to the imperial practice of the neo-Assyrians, of imposing their own language on the peoples they conquered. One inscription of the time records that Ashurbanipal II "made the totality of all peoples speak one speech." A cylinder inscription of Sargon II says, "Populations of the four quarters of the world with strange tongues and incompatible speech... whom I had taken as booty at the command of Ashur my lord by the might of my sceptre, I caused to accept a single voice." The neo-Assyrians asserted their supremacy by insisting that their language was the only one to be used by the nations and populations they had defeated. On this reading, Babel is a critique of imperialism.

There is even a hint of this in the parallelism of language between the builders of Babel and the Egyptian Pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites. In Babel they said, "Come, [hava] let us build ourselves a city and a tower... lest [pen] we be scattered over the face of the earth" (Gen. 11:4). In Egypt Pharaoh said, "Come, [hava] let us deal wisely with them, lest [pen] they increase so much..." (Ex. 1:10). The repeated "Come, let us... lest" is too pronounced to be accidental. Babel, like Egypt, represents an empire that subjugates entire populations, riding roughshod over their identities and freedoms.

If this is so, we will have to re-read the entire Babel story in a way that makes it much more convincing. The sequence is this: Genesis 10 describes the division of humanity into seventy nations and seventy languages. Genesis 11 tells of how one imperial power conquered smaller nations and imposed

their language and culture on them, thus directly contravening G-d's wish that humans should respect the integrity of each nation and each individual. When at the end of the Babel story G-d "confuses the language" of the builders, He is not creating a new state of affairs but restoring the old.

Interpreted thus, the story of Babel is a critique of the power of the collective when it crushes individuality-the individuality of the seventy cultures described in Genesis 10. (A personal note: I had the privilege of addressing 2,000 leaders from all the world's faiths at the Millennium Peace Summit in the United Nations in August 2000. It turned out that there were exactly 70 traditions-each with their subdivisions and sects- represented. So it seems there still are seventy basic cultures). When the rule of law is used to suppress individuals and their distinctive languages and traditions, this too is wrong. The miracle of monotheism is that Unity in Heaven creates diversity on earth, and G-d asks us (with obvious conditions) to respect that diversity.

So the Flood and the Tower of Babel, though polar opposites, are linked, and the entire parsha of Noah is a brilliant study in the human condition. There are individualistic cultures and there are collectivist ones, and both fail, the former because they lead to anarchy and violence, the latter because they lead to oppression and tyranny.

So Paul Johnson's insight turns out to be both deep and true. After the two great failures of the Flood and Babel, Abraham was called on to create a new form of social order that would give equal honour to the individual and the collective, personal responsibility and the common good. That remains the special gift of Jews and Judaism to the world. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Noah is the towering but complex personality who dominates this week's biblical portion. On the one hand, he is a "man of righteousness, wholehearted in his generation; Noah walked with G-d" (Genesis 6:9). Indeed, he is so pious in the eyes of G-d that he alone (with his immediate family) is deemed worthy of surviving the deluge brought upon the world as the consequence of human perversion and violent conduct. Nevertheless, the very same individual becomes drunk toward the end of his life and fails to emerge as one of the patriarchs of the burgeoning Hebrew nation.

Where and why does Noah not quite "make it"? Names are very significant in describing - and perhaps even foretelling - the characteristics of biblical personalities.

Abram, the exalted father, becomes Abraham, the "father of a multitude of nations," and Jacob, the

"heel-sneak," is transformed into Israel, the "one who will enable G-d to triumph," or "the individual who has emerged triumphant from both human and divine encounters."

Let us explore Noah's name and how it - and he - played out in his lifetime. At the end of last week's biblical reading of Bereishit, we read how Methuselah was a descendant of Adam from the lineage of Seth, and he "begat" Lamech, who in turn "begat" Noah; and Noah received his name because "this one shall comfort us (yenamenu) from our work and from the anguished toil of our hands, extracting produce from the earth which the Lord had cursed" (Gen. 5:29).

The classical commentary Rashi immediately points out that according to the biblical explanation, he should have been named Menahem, the one who will give comfort. He would have fulfilled the role of a second Adam who would guide humanity out of its exile and back to Eden. This would also provide a most apt play on words, contrasting with the idea that G-d will soon "regret (vayinahem) that he ever made the human being on earth" due to mankind's rampant immorality (Gen. 6:6). Noah would be the antidote and comfort for G-d's discomfiture with His human creation.

However, this is not quite how things work out. Noah means "ease" or "comfort" (nohiut, a place for rest and refreshment) rather than the comfort (nehama) that comes from making up for a human loss or for a human failing by giving those who have fallen the strength and courage to rise once again.

This was the biblical hope for Noah, that he would teach the new world the importance of being righteous, and that through compassionate righteousness and moral justice, the exile would end and the world would be perfected in the kingship of G-d.

But Noah was somehow unequipped to give over this message. He could not assume the role suggested by his name Menahem (comforter). He was never a people person, given to inspire others with the desire to do what was righteous and good. In his own conduct, he always acted properly; but when G-d told him to build an ark to save his family from an impending flood, he neither remonstrated with G-d to save the world, nor did he remonstrate with the people to change their evil ways. All he could do and be was Noah, to make life easier and more comfortable through technology.

And so explains Rashi, in his commentary on the verse that gives Noah his name, says: "Until Noah came into the world, there were no implements such as the plow, which Noah fashioned for them. Until then, when the people planted wheat [with their hands], the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles as a result of G-d's curse of Adam. In the days of Noah, the farmers were able to take it easier [because of the plow]" (Rashi, Gen. 5:29).

Noah was not a rabbi comforter, spurring humanity on to perfect itself; he was rather Dr. Take-It-

Easy, inventing the technology to help people relax. He should have been an outreach preacher, but instead he became an isolated technologist.

Perhaps, he lacked the self-confidence and the profound faith in G-d's message to enable him to charismatically reach out to others. When the biblical text hints that he entered the ark only "because of the waters of the deluge," that he waited until the flood made it impossible for him to live in his home before he went into the ark, Rashi calls Noah a "man of little faith" - G-d's word alone was not sufficient for him (Rashi on Gen. 7:7).

Perhaps this is what the Bible is hinting at when our sacred text records Noah's drunkenness.

Only an individual who doesn't believe in himself and in the divine within him would require external stimuli such as alcohol or drugs to give him the "high" rather than developing his own inner powers and strengths.

Whatever the reason, clearly Noah was not on the same level as Abraham, the man who "walked before G-d" to prepare the way and reached out to "make souls" inspired to emulate G-d's righteous ways.

That's why Abraham is considered the first Hebrew and not Noah. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DAVID LAPIN

iAwaken

In my Yom Kippur article (<http://iawaken.org/shiurim/view.asp?id=6693>) I wrote about the two operating systems that govern us: the heroic operating system and the defensive, instinctual one. It goes without saying that we can master our heroic system. We can dominate our instinctual system, our yeitzer harah, with our heroic system, our yeitzer hatov. Lead By Greatness (now due out by Mid-November IY"H) will provide methodology to do this. But can we also improve our instinctual systems? Can we so to say, rewire our instinct and elevate it? The Rambam says we can and this week's parsha shows how even animals can rewire their instincts!

In the beginning of the Rambam's Hilchos Dei'os, he describes how we can achieve the golden mean of behavior by practicing the extremity opposite of the behavior we are trying to change. If a person is stingy, they should practice extreme generosity for a period of time and then they will find a comfortable place at the golden mean between financial discipline and generosity. Two things are puzzling about the Rambam's methodology of behaviorist therapy:

1. If we are talking of behaviors that are required of us, that are mitzvos, then we should be able to make choices and exercise our bechira as with any other mitzvah without going through an extended behavioristic process. Whenever we are confronted with a choice, we are free to choose, this applies both to

ritual mitzvos and to middos (behavior). Where else do we see a process of conditioning ourselves in order to keep a mitzvah?

2. If halacha requires that we live at the golden mean, where does the Rambam get the halachik authority to permit us to voluntarily live at an extremity, albeit temporarily and for educational purposes?

On reflection it seems that the Rambam's advice is not for people making a balanced choice. The Rambam is addressing the breaking of a habit or addiction. How do you break the addiction to bad behavior? Once a behavior becomes a habit, it is no longer part of the heroic system. When a behavior is a habit it is wired into our systems and becomes part of our instinctual reactions not our value-choices. It is in these cases that the Rambam innovates the idea that even wired behaviors, habits and addictions can be modified through behaviorist processes. By practicing a behavior at the opposite extreme of a habit, the habit can be broken and the individual can again free him or herself to choose the golden mean.

From where does the Rambam take a precedent for this? Where in the Torah does the Rambam see behavior modification by practicing the opposite extreme, as an acceptable way to break an addiction and modify one's habitual conduct?

There is a remarkable comment of R. Yochanan in Sanhedrin 108b that has perplexed countless commentators. Commenting on the fact that the animals exited Noah's Ark "grouped in families", R. Yochanan says only two words: "Veloh Heim" (They were not them.) What could he mean?

The Meshech Chochmah [(Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk; 1843-1926) (Bereishis 8:19) explains that the animal world transformed in the Ark; the animals that emerged were not the same species as those that went into the Ark. In the worldview of the Torah, individual people and animal species are defined not only by their physical characteristics but also by their habitual behavior. In this sense, the animals before the flood bore little behavioral resemblance to those after the flood. When Noah loaded his Ark the animal world had been corrupted too and bred across its species, an activity akin to adultery in human terms. For a year the animals were completely separated from females of their or other species. Additionally they had to be satisfied with meager rations and they had to subject themselves to the disciplines imposed on them by Noah and his family. The result of this disciplined life was a behavioral transformation that impacted the animal world for all time. They emerged from the Ark grouped in families (Bereishis 8:19) and accepted to remain faithful to their own species for all time (Rashi ibid.) -- they were transformed. This is the meaning of R. Yochanan's comment: "Veloh Heim" (They were not them.)

Here we see the source of the Rambam's behavioral therapy process! It is possible and

recommended by the Torah to free ourselves of corrupted behavior even when such behavior has become as engrained in us as an animal's instinct.

It can take a year of hyper-discipline to rewire our instinctual operating systems and return them to the authenticity with which they were created. If animals can do it so can we. © 2011 Rabbi D. Lapin & iAwaken

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One can only view the entire Torah narrative of parshat Noach as being one that describes lost opportunities, of roads not taken and chances missed. It begins with the generation of Noach itself. Noach warns his society of the looming disaster that will destroy them and their world and its civilization. Either he is not persuasive enough or the society is purposely and perversely oblivious to what is about to happen to their world.

Many times in history, both Jewish and general, we are witness to the consequences of not taking heed of warnings and ignoring evident signs of danger. No one likes to listen to prophets of gloom and doom. These contrarians disturb our daily lives and its sense of equilibrium and inertia. We say that we want positive change to occur but in our hearts we are more than satisfied to have the status quo of life remain.

So Noach's generation misses an opportunity to save itself and thereby to change all of later world history. They judge Noach and his ark building project as being odd if not entirely daft. So, even as the rains begin and the water begins to rise they continue to scoff at Noach and his message to them.

The unwanted savior is usually ignored in human events. He does not fit our preconceived matrix of help and salvation and thus, though he may be accurate and correct in his assessments, he is usually reviled, ridiculed and ignored. I need not give examples of this truism of human behavior to those of us who have lived in Israel over the past number of decades.

After the flood it is Noach himself who is found wanting in this very trait of missed opportunities. The reason that the commentators have always seemed to treat Noach negatively, even harshly, is because he missed out on creating a new world unsullied by past error and sin. An opportunity such is that, essentially the same one offered to Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden, has never again been offered to anyone else in the long history of human civilization.

Not accepting that offer, not seizing that opportunity is the weakness that dooms Noach to criticism and bad reviews in Jewish rabbinic scholarship. The Torah itself advances clearly the necessity to make correct decisions and choices in life. The Torah tells us to choose life over death, good over evil, the eternal over the fleeting.

Many times the refusal to make any choice when the correct one was patently present is not viewed in Judaism as being cautious or neutral. Rather it is viewed as being a fatally wrong choice. An opportunity squandered is a sin and sins of omission are many times worse and more dangerous than sins of commission.

Our lives are defined by the choices that we have made and continue to make. Often times the necessity of making such choices is unavoidable for outside circumstances crowd in upon us. Hopefully the Lord will grant us enough wisdom to take advantage of opportunities presented and to make wise choices in our personal and national lives. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After leaving the ark, Noah becomes drunk and uncovers himself. (Genesis 9:21) His children, having witnessed this act, react in very different ways. Ham, together with his son, Canaan, appear to mock their father. In contrast, Shem and Yefet remain silent and modestly take a garment and cover their father's nakedness. (Genesis 9:22, 23) Here, the acts of Noah's children teach us a lot as they present different responses to being disappointed by someone dear-whether it be a fellow human being or even G-d.

Consider our relationship with G-d. At times we become disillusioned with G-d's ways. This may lead to doubting the Almighty. Sa'adia Gaon suggests that rather allowing the doubt to destroy our belief in G-d, we should isolate the uncertainty and try to learn from it. But, even if we can't make peace with that point of doubt, we should continue to believe. The challenge is to step back and consider the larger picture. We may feel that G-d has hurt us in certain ways, but when we pan back we are able to look and see how much G-d has given us.

Similarly, in human relationships. When a friend disappoints us-and there is no friendship without disappointment-we can opt to allow that particular feeling to destroy the larger relationship or we can bracket the falling out and try to learn from it. But even if the issue which caused the tension is not resolved, we have it within our power to take into account that person's goodness, realize that every one of us has certain flaws and move on with the friendship.

So, too, in our narrative. After providing heroically for his family for the entire time of the flood, Noah fails-he becomes drunk. The reaction of Ham and Canaan was to allow this mistake to destroy their entire relationship with their father.

Not so with Shem and Yefet. No doubt their father had become drunk. But they did not focus in exclusively on that failure. They took into account their father's whole personality. Hence, they cover up his nakedness, symbolizing their readiness to isolate the wrong and learn from it, even as they continue to love and respect their father.

Since we are not perfect, we cannot expect perfection from others. No relationship will be without some disappointment. As we tolerate our failings, so too should we learn to tolerate the failings of others. Interestingly, one of the words for beloved - whether referring to G-d or another human being - is re'ah, from the word ra, which means "evil." The test of a relationship is what happens when a disappointment sets in, when something ra occurs.

Shem and Yefet teach that in a genuine and deep relationship, one can acknowledge disappointment, while at the same time, not allowing a falling out to sweepingly destroy the bond of friendship, commitment, growth and love. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA

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The sequence of expression in the opening pasukim [verses] of our parsha [Bereshis 6:9-10] is noteworthy. The Torah begins "And these are the offspring of Noah" (Eleh toldos Noah), which would lead us to expect that we will be immediately told the names of Noah's children. However, the Torah first says, "Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations". Only after that does the Torah continue, "Noach had begotten three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafes." It seems that the description of Noah's righteousness is out of place in the narrative. Rashi comments on this unusual sequence and says this teaches that the main offspring (i.e. creations) of righteous people are their good deeds. The true descendants of a Tzadik are not the physical children he leaves behind, but his acts of kindness.

This is truly an amazing statement. Each of us is here because of Noah. What is the greatest legacy that Noah left the world? I would say that the answer is simple: humanity! The fact that there are people in this world is the greatest legacy that Noah could leave. Yet Chazal explain that the pasuk is teaching us that this is not true. Noah's greatest legacy (as is the case with all Tzadikim) is his good deeds! We are commanded to have children but children are also human beings. They

are not eternal. They will die and ultimately leave this world. However, there is something we can do in this world that is eternal and never ceases to exist, namely our good deeds! This is an amazing statement.

The Medrash says that the wife of Noach was Naamah, a descendant of Kayin. We are told about some of Cain's other descendants [Bereshis 4:20-22]. One was Yaval, who founded the cattle and shepherd industry, which has been around for thousands of years. Another was Yuval. He was the first musician. A third descendant, Tuval Kayin, was the first metalworker. He fashioned metal into swords. All of these individuals died. The flood wiped out their descendants and their legacies. Naamah, on the other hand, is the only descendant of Kayin to survive. Why did she survive? Chazal say that she was called Na'amah because her actions were "Naim u'neimim"-they were pleasant and brought pleasure to others.

The point is that accomplishments, even creating major industries, music, and so forth are all fine and good but they are not eternal. They do not last forever. The only thing in this world that is truly eternal is spirituality and good deeds. This is the point of the aforementioned teaching of our Sages: The major offspring of the righteous is their good deeds. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood.....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those

times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones." (57:15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nospecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an

unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd [Noach] sent the dove from with him, in order to see if the waters upon the face of the ground had lessened" (B'raishis 8:8). Although the dove returned from its first trip empty-beaked, on its second trip it brought back a torn leaf from an olive tree, so "Noach knew that the water had lessened from the land" (8:11). What was Noach's reaction upon finding this out? He sent the dove away a third time, a trip from which it never returned (8:12). Noach then removed the ark's cover and saw that the ground had dried (8:13), but remained on the ark until G-d told him to leave it (8:16). The Brisker Rav, z"l, quoted by Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (Rinas Yitzchok I), asks why Noach sent the dove (and the raven before it) if he wasn't planning to leave the ark until G-d gave him permission to do so.

Rav Sorotzkin suggests two answers, both of which are rather puzzling. B'raishis Rabbah (34:2) uses the verse that says G-d commanded Noach to leave the ark to show that Noach was among those who G-d tested with confidence that he would pass. Maharzo explains that even though Noach knew that the ground had dried, he didn't leave the torturous conditions of the ark (aside from being confined to it for an entire year, and being unable to bathe, the smell of the similarly unbathed animals and all of the bodily waste they produced made for extremely harsh conditions) until G-d told him he could. Rav Sorotzkin points out that Noach knew that the ground had dried because the dove didn't return the third time, which prompted him to remove the ark's cover and verify it. Therefore, Rav Sorotzkin continues, Noach had to send the birds in order to find out that he could physically leave so that G-d could test him. What puzzling about this approach is that it was G-d who was testing Noach to see if he would leave before being told he could, not Noach putting himself in a position to have to resist the temptation to do so before getting permission. Nevertheless, unless Maharzo thought Noach would have found out that the land was dry even if he hadn't sent the birds, his explanation needs further explaining (as would the Midrash itself). Rav Sorotzkin's second suggestion, which is based on sources that indicate that G-d gives the righteous something to base hope upon even while they are suffering, has the same issue. Did Noach decide to send the birds so that G-d could take credit for providing hope that he could soon leave?

There's another issue that needs to be addressed as well. If Noach knew that he wasn't allowed to leave until G-d gave him permission to, how could he send the raven and the dove out of the ark without divine permission? The same commandment that told him to enter and not leave until given the go ahead should apply to the animals as well; until G-d gave him permission to let the animals get off the ark, he should have been bound to keep them there as well. Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe and Chidushum) asks this question, and maintains that Noach sent the birds out despite not having the needed permission as a "hora'as shu'uh," a temporary suspension of the rules due to extenuating circumstances. (He doesn't explain what those extreme conditions were.) Netziv also addresses this issue, suggesting that this raven and this dove were not part of the "2 by 2" (or "7 and 7" for the dove) that G-d had commanded Noach to take aboard, so weren't subject to the prohibition of not being able to leave until G-d said they could. Rather, these birds were Noach's personal pets, so he was allowed to send them off the ark even though all the other animals had to stay until G-d said it was okay to get off. Although it might have been traumatic for Noach to have left his pets to drown with the rest of civilization, was that enough to be able to bring them aboard? If G-d approved, why weren't these birds part of the "2 by 2" (and "7 and 7") needed?

Why did G-d have Noah bring another two ravens (et al) besides his personal one? [Obviously, the Midrash (see Sanhedrin 108b) regarding the raven's complaint that sending him risked his species coming to an end did not think there were two other ravens on the ark.]

"Noach said, 'just as I did not enter the ark without permission, so too I will not leave [the ark] without permission.'" The wording of the Midrash (B'raishis Rabbah 34:4) indicates that there was no explicit prohibition against leaving the ark before G-d told him he could leave. Rather, Noach, on his own, took it upon himself not to leave before G-d gave him the go-ahead. This may help mitigate the problem of how Noach was able to send the birds away, but leaves us wondering why he applied this logic to himself and his family but not to the animals if the commandment to board the ark applied to both. Was it only "midas chasidus" (going above and beyond the requirement), which didn't apply to the animal kingdom? If so, how could he make his family suffer longer than they were required to? Did they follow his lead? How could not leaving until he was given permission be considered a "test" if he was really allowed to leave?

If Noach was unsure whether or not he was allowed to get off the ark before G-d gave him permission, or if his family wanted to get off ASAP and Noach was trying to convince them that they can't, all of these questions (and others) can be answered. I would suggest that the reason Noach sent the raven was not in order to find out if the waters had receded (which is why it isn't mentioned until he sent the dove). Rather, Noach sent the raven specifically to try to determine whether or not he was allowed to leave the ark before G-d explicitly gave him permission to.

Although Noach was commanded to gather two animals from each species (male and female), they came by themselves (see Rashi on 7:9). Not that a lot of animals from each species camped out overnight in order to be first in line so they can get in. Rather, only the two G-d wanted to save from each species had their natural instincts "hijacked," leading them to the ark. It would follow that this "instinct" to board the ark lasted throughout their stay on the ark, or the animals wouldn't have been able to live there calmly for the entire year. When did this "ark instinct" fade? Was it in affect until Noach threw them off (see Rashi on 8:17)? Was it only in affect until they no longer needed to be on the ark? Sending the raven away might indicate whether or not the ark's inhabitants had to stay on board until G-d gave them permission to leave. If the raven refused to leave, it would indicate that G-d didn't want any of them to leave until He said it was okay. On the other hand, if the raven did leave, meaning its "ark instinct" was no longer active, it would indicate that G-d didn't forbid them from leaving without divine permission.

Noach sends the raven away, and it goes (8:7). Even though it can't find anyplace to land (so it stayed near the ark or continuously went in and out of it), its

willingness to "go out" should indicate that permission to leave need not be granted. However, Noach discovers something else—that the raven had impregnated its mate (see Sanhedrin 108b), thus negating its need to stay in the ark. The "raven test" was no longer valid, as the raven could be the exception to the rule; it no longer needed its "ark instinct," so its willingness to leave couldn't prove that permission wasn't needed. (The very fact that it cohabitated with its mate—while almost every other animal didn't—could mean that it didn't have the same "ark instinct" as the others. If Noach had already known that the raven had been with his mate, he may have told his family that even if it left it wouldn't prove that they could leave without permission, although if it refused to leave it would prove that they couldn't.)

Noach was hoping the "raven test" would either indicate whether or not he had to wait for G-d's permission to leave or convince his family that they couldn't. Even though it didn't accomplish this, he saw how their demeanor improved when the process of leaving the ark (seeing if the raven's "ark instinct" had expired) was started, and how disappointed they were after discovering that the test didn't work and that the raven couldn't find any dry land. In order to revitalize their spirits, he decided to send out the dove so that they could track the progress of the water's recession. Was he allowed to send the dove out "from with him" (8:8), indicating its reluctance to leave, before divine permission was given? Perhaps this was a "hora'as shu'uh" made because of how necessary it was to provide his family reason to think they would leave the ark soon, or perhaps the issue of leaving the ark prematurely wasn't the same for those species that had 14 members aboard and not just two. Either way, the "raven test" led to Noach sending out the dove, which provided a "light at the end of the tunnel" as well as placing Noach (and his family) in the position of knowing that the land was dry, yet waiting for G-d's permission before leaving the ark. G-d may have been purposely ambiguous about whether or not Noach could leave the ark without permission so that he would try to figure it out, and in the process be faced with the test of not leaving the ark despite knowing that the land was dry, all the while knowing that the end was within sight.

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