

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Is there such a thing as an objective basis of morality? For some time, in secular circles, the idea has seemed absurd. Morality is what we choose it to be. We are free to do what we like so long as we don't harm others. Moral judgments are not truths but choices. There is no way of getting from "is" to "ought", from description to prescription, from facts to values, from science to ethics. This was the received wisdom in philosophy for a century after Nietzsche had argued for the abandonment of morality-which he saw as the product of Judaism-in favour of the "will to power".

Recently, however, an entirely new scientific basis has been given to morality from two surprising directions: neo-Darwinism and the branch of mathematics known as Games Theory. As we will see, the discovery is intimately related to the story of Noach and the covenant made between G-d and humanity after the Flood.

Games theory was invented by one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century, John von Neumann (1903-1957). He realised that the mathematical models used in economics were unrealistic and did not mirror the way decisions are made in the real world. Rational choice is not simply a matter of weighing alternatives and deciding between them. The reason is that the outcome of our decision often depends on how other people react to it, and usually we cannot know this in advance. Games theory, von Neumann's invention in 1944, was an attempt to produce a mathematical representation of choice under conditions of uncertainty. Six years later, it yielded its most famous paradox, known as the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Imagine two people, arrested by the police under suspicion of committing a crime. There is insufficient evidence to convict them on a serious charge; there is only enough to convict them of a lesser offence. The police decide to encourage each to inform against the other. They separate them and make each the following proposal: if you testify against the other suspect, you will go free, and he will be imprisoned for ten years. If he testifies against you, and you stay silent, you will be sentenced to ten years in prison, and he will go free. If you both testify against one another, you will each receive a five-year sentence. If both of you stay

silent, you will each be convicted of the lesser charge and face a one-year sentence.

It doesn't take long to work out that the optimal strategy for each is to inform against the other. The result is that each will be imprisoned for five years. The paradox is that the best outcome would be for both to remain silent. They would then only face one year in prison. The reason that neither will opt for this strategy is that it depends on collaboration. However, since each is unable to know what the other is doing-there is no communication between them-they cannot take the risk of staying silent. The Prisoner's Dilemma is remarkable because it shows that two people, both acting rationally, will produce a result that is bad for both of them.

Eventually, a solution was discovered. The reason for the paradox is that the two prisoners find themselves in this situation only once. If it happened repeatedly, they would eventually discover that the best thing to do is to trust one another and co-operate.

In the meantime, biologists were wrestling with a phenomenon that puzzled Darwin. The theory of natural selection-popularly known as the survival of the fittest-suggests that the most ruthless individuals in any population will survive and hand their genes on to the next generation. Yet almost every society ever observed values individuals who are altruistic: who sacrifice their own advantage to help others. There seems to be a direct contradiction between these two facts.

The Prisoner's Dilemma suggested an answer. Individual self-interest often produces bad results. Any group which learns to cooperate, instead of compete, will be at an advantage relative to others. But, as the Prisoner's Dilemma showed, this needs repeated encounters-the so-called "Iterated (= repeated) Prisoner's dilemma". In the late 1970s, a competition was announced to find the computer program that did best at playing the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma against itself and other opponents.

The winning programme was devised by a Canadian, Anatole Rapoport, and was called Tit-for-Tat. It was dazzlingly simple: it began by co-operating, and then repeated the last move of its opponent. It worked on the rule of "What you did to me, I will do to you", or "measure for measure". This was the first time scientific proof had been given for any moral principle.

What is fascinating about this chain of discoveries is that it precisely mirrors the central principle of the covenant G-d made with Noah: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his

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blood be shed; for in the image of G-d has G-d made man."

This is measure for measure [in Hebrew, middah keneged middah], or retributive justice: As you do, so shall you be done to. In fact, at this point the Torah does something very subtle. The six words in which the principle is stated are a mirror image of one another: [1] Who sheds [2] the blood [3] of man, [3a] by man [2a] shall his blood [1a] be shed. This is a perfect example of style reflecting substance: what is done to us is a mirror image of what we do. The extraordinary fact is that the first moral principle set out in the Torah is also the first moral principle ever to be scientifically demonstrated. Tit-for-Tat is the computer equivalent of (retributive) justice: Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

The story has a sequel. In 1989, the Polish mathematician Martin Nowak produced a programme that beats Tit-for-Tat. He called it Generous. It overcame one weakness of Tit-for-Tat, namely that when you meet a particularly nasty opponent, you get drawn into a potentially endless and destructive cycle of retaliation, which is bad for both sides. Generous avoided this by randomly but periodically forgetting the last move of its opponent, thus allowing the relationship to begin again. What Nowak had produced, in fact, was a computer simulation of forgiveness.

Once again, the connection with the story of Noah and the Flood is direct. After the Flood, G-d vowed: "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done." This is the principle of Divine forgiveness.

Thus the two great principles of the Noachide covenant are also the first two principles to have been established by computer simulation. There is an objective basis for morality after all. It rests on two key ideas: justice and forgiveness, or what the sages called middat ha-din and middat rachamim. Without these, no group can survive in the long run.

In one of the first great works of Jewish philosophy-Sefer Emunot ve-Deot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) -- R. Saadia Gaon (882-942) explained that the truths of the Torah could be established by reason. Why then was revelation necessary? Because it takes humanity time to arrive at truth, and there are

many slips and pitfalls along the way. It took more than a thousand years after R. Saadia Gaon for humanity to demonstrate the fundamental moral truths that lie at the basis of G-d's covenant with humankind: that co-operation is as necessary as competition, that co-operation depends on trust, that trust requires justice, and that justice itself is incomplete without forgiveness. Morality is not simply what we choose it to be. It is part of the basic fabric of the universe, revealed to us by the universe's Creator, long ago. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"The entire earth had one language with uniform words, (or policies, or ideas, as in the Hebrew, *devarim ahadim*). (Genesis 11:1) After the Great Flood and the subsequent renewal of the world's civilization, the Bible records a first attempt at governmental and societal re-constitution with the Tower of Babel. In the wake of a new-found unity (or uniformity) upon which this grandiose scheme was based, "each individual said to the other, 'Come, let us mold bricks and burn them in fire.' And the brick served them as stone and the asphalt served them as mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top shall reach the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered all over the face of the earth.'" (Genesis 11:2-4).

Apparently, these people were striving for unity; they were attempting to prevent dispersion or exile of disparate, separate groups of peoples through the centralization of a single governmental power. But, almost inexplicably, this program is not pleasing in the eyes of G-d. "The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'" So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it He called it Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth." (Ibid 6-9)

What is the Lord so upset with them about? Is our G-d against unity, against centralized and uniform activity? Is He in favor of divisions and dispersions? What about our clarion call of faith, our ringing declaration of unity, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one"?! What about the messianic promise of the prophet Zephaniah, "For then I shall change the nations to speak a pure language (the Radak interprets that they will be dedicated to pure and G-dly purposes; the Ibn Ezra maintains that they will all speak Hebrew), for all of them to proclaim in the Name of the Lord, to serve Him with a united resolve" (Zephaniah 3:9). Is this not a call for unity of all the nations, which the G-d of the

prophet Zephaniah identifies with the ultimate redemption?

In order to understand the deep chasm which divides Babel from Zephaniah, we must analyze the purpose behind each type of unity. After all, unity is a mighty force; just as unity used for a positive purpose can re-create the world in the Kingship of G-d, so unity with a negative resolve can destroy the world.

Zephaniah desired unity so that all nations will "proclaim the Name of the Lord," which is Love and Compassion, Loving-kindness and Truth (Exodus 34:5-8). He desired a united resolve of all nations to serve the Lord of the Universe, by performing acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Genesis 18:18,19). Babel, on the other hand, desired unity in order "to make for ourselves a name," in order to invest with supreme power an oligarchy of bureaucratic despots interested in gigantic buildings for their own self-aggrandizement (Babylonian Ziggurats), devoid of concern for the common welfare or for the triumph of good over evil, right over might.

Indeed, the rabbis of the Midrash masterfully read between the lines of the Bible. They suggest that the people of Babel planned that the top of the tower would reach the heavens in order to "murder" the G-d of love, morality and peace, and that the builders would hardly notice if a human being fell to the ground, but they would mourn if a brick fell to the ground (Bereishit Rabbah, ad loc). Babel is Communist, totalitarian materialism.

The other major distinction between Babel and our Bible lies in uniformity versus unity. Our Biblical tradition is profoundly supportive of unity in terms of ethical conduct, even insisting upon universal ethical absolutism regarding the Seven Noahide Laws of Morality and the universal acceptance of a G-d of Peace (Isaiah 2, Maimonides Laws of Kings 8,10); however, Micah (4:5) proclaims the possibility of religious pluralism; "Let everyone walk in the Name of his G-d, and we will walk in the Name of the Lord our G-d forever", and our Mishnah glories in the fact that G-d has created different people of widely different physiognomies and ethnic appearances as well as of different outlooks and philosophies (Sanhedrin 4: 5).

As long as everyone is on the same page in terms of a commitment to a G-d of peace and morality, the Messiah will not be far behind. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The opening parshiyot of the Torah portray a rather dismal picture of the human race and of our world generally. Everything noble and worthwhile seems to have spun away in a flood of vice, avarice, and murder. And this type of human behavior seems to

have filtered down to the other forms of life on the planet as well.

The great flood described in this week's parsha can therefore be seen, so to speak, as a do-over, by G-d, of the time of creation. We all know the feeling that comes upon us when after working on a project for a period of time, when we become convinced of the project's failure and are aware of the need to start all over again from the beginning, we must discard all that had previously been invested in the endeavor.

But as the parsha indicates, there is little to choose between the world society before the flood and the one that emerged after the flood. So the Lord, so to speak, adopts a different tack. Though G-d is disappointed by human behavior, G-d never irrevocably despairs of humans, individually or collectively.

Now G-d will wait patiently until humans on their own, through their inner sense, seriously begin to search and find meaning and purpose in life. This search will inexorably lead to the Creator and a moral code of behavior. Noach, as great a person as he was, was unable to transmit to his descendants the necessary sense of self-morality and that inner drive for self-improvement and righteousness which he possessed. Without that inner search for the Creator, no outside revelation or cataclysmic event, no flood or war or Holocaust, can achieve an improved moral climate in human society.

The parsha records for us G-d's commitment not to bring another flood upon humankind. Outside pressures and historic events, no matter how impressive and intense they may be, are not the ways to inspire and improve human behavior. A change of the human heart, a rethinking of life's meaning and mission, a yearning for spirit and eternity, is the proven method for achieving a more just and noble society.

That is clearly the message that all of the great prophets of Israel imparted to us. As we recently commemorated the conclusion of the seven-year daily learning cycle, an enthusiastic young man boasted to me how he had now "gone through" the Talmud. It brought to mind the sharp comment of one of the great Chasidic masters of earlier times who replied to such a boast from one of his followers: "Wonderful! But now the question remains how much of the Talmud has gone through you?!"

The lesson of this week's parsha, as it is the lesson of the Torah in its depth and entirety, is that the path to knowledge and service of G-d runs through one's own inner feelings, attitudes, ideals and commitments. The task of Jewish parenting and education is to impart this basic truism of life to the next generation. And as the Torah itself testifies, this ability to do so was what separated Avraham from Noach, and the Jewish people originally from the nations of the world. © 2012 *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*

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The picture of Noah's ark in children's books with a giraffe neck up, hanging out of the ark, speaks to a fundamental question. How did all the animals, birds and creeping things fit into the ark? (Genesis 6:19)

Ibn Ezra characteristically offers a literal observation. The cubit mentioned in the Torah with respect to building the ark, was of tremendous length—longer than what the Torah would later consider to be the length of a cubit. The ark, for Ibn Ezra, was massive. Hence, it could contain everything.

Ramban disagrees. For him, it was, in fact, miraculous that the ark was able to take in an unlimited number of species that existed. To paraphrase Ramban, a miracle was performed and the small space was able to contain everything.

It is here that Ramban asks—if, in fact, that were the case, why didn't G-d ask Noah to build the ark even smaller?

Here Ramban introduces a basic concept concerning miracles. Even when a miracle occurs, humankind must do its share. In the words of Ramban, "this is the way of all miracles in the Torah....for humankind to do what it can and for the rest to be left in the hands of G-d."

Ramban's position on miracles becomes complete when taking into account his opinion that Avraham (Abraham), in next week's portion, sinned when he left the land of Israel without G-d's permission, because of the famine. Avraham had no right to leave the land without explicit permission from G-d. (Ramban, Genesis 12:10)

Yet, it could be argued that Avraham, by acting to improve his situation, did not sin. He did what he had to, and did not rely on miracles to save himself and his family.

Bearing in mind Ramban's passion for Zion as found in the Noah story, a possible solution to the Avraham inconsistency comes to mind. Ramban argues that the olive branch brought by the dove after the deluge, came from the land of Israel, which was not destroyed during the flood. (Ramban, Genesis 8:11) For Ramban, Israel is in a unique category. When it comes to the land of Israel, we can rely on miracles. Avraham should therefore not have left, he should have kept hope that G-d would intervene—as the land of Israel escaped the deluge so would it survive the famine.

When considering the courage of many Israelis living on the border, who, despite bombardments from the enemy over the years, held their ground and refused to budge, Ramban's comments come to mind. We're not to rely on miracles. But relative to the State of Israel, G-d watches even more closely. © 2012 Hebrew Institute

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah projects the glorious future of the Jewish people and describes the splendor of Jerusalem in breath-taking dimensions. In the midst of this indescribable vision the prophet Yeshaya draws a striking comparison between our present exile and the flood in the time of Noach. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For a brief moment of anger I concealed My countenance from you but with everlasting kindness I will show My compassion. As with the waters of Noach about which I swore that they will never again flood the world so have I sworn never again to become angry with Israel." (54: 8, 9) The prophet assures the Jewish people that their painful years of exile will soon draw to a close never to be repeated. Drawing attention to the flood, he guarantees that, "As the world has never experienced a second flood so will the Jewish people never experience another exile." This peculiar equation between the flood and the Jewish people's exile suggests a strong association between the two. It appears that Hashem's unconditional guarantee to withhold a flood from this world serves as sound evidence to the eternal redemption of the Jewish people.

In order to appreciate this association, let us analyze Noach's role during the flood and Hashem's response to it. The Torah tells us in the beginning of our Sidra that the flood was sent because humanity turned totally inwards. The Torah states, "And the land was corrupt before Hashem and the land was full of robbery." (Breishis 6:11) All of mankind became focused on themselves—satisfying all of their personal pursuits without taking anyone else's privileges and rights into consideration. They regarded everyone and their possessions permissible to themselves in order to satisfy their personal interests and desires. Humanity was literally destroying itself with every person concerned only for himself, showing no care or respect for anyone else. During the months of the flood it became Noach's sole responsibility to restore morality to the world. The prevalent principles and policies in the Ark, Noach's world, had to be kindness and compassion. Every moment spent there had to be filled with caring and sharing. Hashem therefore charged Noach with the overwhelming responsibility of providing and tending to the needs of every living being in the Ark. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108B see Maharsha ad loc.) relates a conversation between Noach's son, Shem, and Eliezer wherein Shem stated that he never formally went to sleep throughout the twelve months he was in the Ark. Noach's family was totally preoccupied with their magnanimous chore of continuously following the

varied feeding schedules of each living being. In this way, the family was totally involved in acts of kindness, providing for others every moment of their stay. This total reversal of priorities, placing their entire focus on the needs of others, reestablished the world. In fact, our Chazal in the Midrash (Breishis Rabba 33:4) understand this to be the single merit through which the floodwaters ended and Noach's family was permitted to leave the Ark and reenter the world.

Upon reentry, Noach immediately approached Hashem through sacrificial offerings and pleaded with Hashem never to repeat the devastating floodwaters. In this week's haftorah we discover that Hashem responded with an oath that a flood of those dimensions would never reoccur. Apparently, Noach's total dedication to kindness bore everlasting fruits and in response to Noach's kindness Hashem promised to shower His boundless kindness on the world. The Malbim (see commentary on Yeshaya 54:10) reflects that the nature of kindness distinguishes itself in regards to the recipient's worthiness. Unlike compassion and mercy which are governed by and fashioned according to the worthiness of the individual in need, kindness knows no bounds. In essence, one need not be worthy in order to qualify for Hashem's kindness. In view of this, the Malbim explains that a pledge of Hashem's kindness is, by definition, an eternal commitment. Throughout the era of the flood, Noach totally preoccupied him self with kindness and, in response, Hashem promised that throughout the era of this world He will preoccupy Himself with the world's kindness. This kindness translated into the unconditional guarantee that regardless how undeserving the world becomes it will never experience total destruction.

In view of this, Yeshaya draws our attention to this guarantee and states in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may jar and the hills may shift, but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never falter." (54:10) As we have seen regarding Noach's kindness, Hashem promises to respond to our kindness with a similar unconditional guarantee. This kindness means that Hashem will never respond to our shortcomings with expressions of anger. Irrespective of our behavior, never again will the Jewish people experience exile and other similar manifestations of Hashem's wrath. Once the Jewish people return to Eretz Yisroel, never again will Hashem remove His sacred presence from their midst. Hashem's kindness is eternal and after the Jewish people will receive His promise of kindness, it will be an unconditional and everlasting one.

This insight reveals to us the hidden message of Chazal and profoundly reflects upon the affluence of our generation. Chazal (see Rashi, Breishis 12:2) inform us of the character of the generation preceding Mashiach. They explain Hashem's introductory Bracha to Avrohom Avinu stated in the beginning of Lech Lecha

in the following manner. There will be certain generations wherein Hashem's influence will be realized through our acts of kindness, others through our acts of devotion and sacrifice, and others through our commitment to Torah and truth. But in the era which precedes Mashiach the prevalent virtue will be kindness. (based on the reflections of HoRav HaGaon Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l) This particular era distinguishes itself by being the launching pad for the era of Mashiach. This preceding era and its merits must secure the coming of Mashiach and all associated blessings. Amongst the blessings of Mashiach's times is Hashem's promise to shower us with His everlasting kindness, guaranteeing our eternal stay in Eretz Yisroel.

But this commitment of everlasting kindness will only come in response to our selfless and personal commitment to unconditional kindness. This explains why never before has the opportunity of kindness availed itself to the Jewish people in such extraordinary proportions as in our days. Yes, with our generation accepting its responsibility and displaying of loving kindness we will deserve Hashem's unconditional response of His everlasting kindness. Yeshaya therefore points us to the flood and assures us that, as Hashem responded to Noach's kindness with His unconditional guarantee we should realize wholeheartedly that Hashem will also respond to our kindness with that same unconditional guarantee and shower His blessing upon His people for eternity. © 2012 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by R. Reuven Ziegler, R. Dov Karoll & Meira Mintz

When we ask ourselves about the efficacy of prayer, we are speaking, in the first sense, about the efficacy of bakkasha (petition): Are we granted what we request? Idealists ranging from the mystics to Kant have expressed opposition to the entire enterprise of bakkasha, claiming it is selfish and egocentric. This position, however, is not characteristic of Judaism. We neither countenance nor encourage a sense of human independence, the feeling that we could somehow manage on our own. Indeed, we do not think that there is anything idealistic or self-sacrificing in thinking we can fend for ourselves.

It is an open question whether or not the essence of religion relates to the sense of dependence, as Schleiermacher stated and the Maharal, lehavdil, suggested before him; perhaps other elements are the quintessence of Judaism. But the sense of dependence and the recognition of human need, and the subsequent turning to the Ribbono shel Olam for succor and sustenance, are certainly critical. According to Chazal (Berakhot 10a-b), this is the import of the verses that speak of Chizkiyahu's illness (II Melakhim 20,

Yeshayahu 38) -- when one is in need, one should turn to the Ribbono shel Olam with bakkasha.

However, tefilla can be considered efficacious regardless of whether there is a positive response to the request presented. Tefilla is listed among the three elements that we declare on the Yamim Noraim as revoking the evil decree: teshuva, tefilla, and tzedaka. What is common to all three is that they can be effective by making one into a better person, a better oved or ovedet Hashem (servant of G-d), thereby nullifying the previously-issued decree. Accordingly, not only bakkasha, but also the prayer of shevach (praise) and the prayer of hoda'a (thanksgiving) are certainly part of avodat Hashem, and they too can lead to the desired result.

Thus, we confront the question of the efficacy on two planes. First, is our request answered? Second, are we worthy, or worthier, of its being answered by dint of the fact that we have turned to the Ribbono shel Olam and acknowledged His control "like a servant before his Master," thereby giving expression to the quality of our relationship with Him? Every time one prays properly, whether one says so explicitly or not, implicit in the tefilla is the declaration, "Ana avda de-Kudsha berikh hu, I am a servant of the Holy One, blessed be He." This is the essence of avodat Hashem, service of G-d. Maharal properly noted that this avoda is related to servitude, the sense of subservience to the Ribbono shel Olam that is the essence of religious life- "Avadai hem, They are My servants" (Vayikra 25:42, 55).

Thus, a ma'amin believes that his prayers are efficacious in some way even if the particular request he makes is not granted. The Rav z"l often emphasized that tefilla is essentially an experience of standing before the King. During shemoneh esrei in particular, one does not send a missive to the Ribbono shel Olam, but rather stands before Him, like a servant before his Master. Even the great mitzva of keriat shema does not entail the awe and trembling that accompany the amida, when one stands before the King Himself. This is the reason, according to Rashi (Berakhot 25a), that while minimal clothing is sufficient for the recitation of shema, it does not suffice for shemoneh esrei. For shemoneh esrei, one must conduct himself as one standing before royalty, while for keriat shema, one is not talking before the King, but rather making a statement about Him. There are numerous halakhot regarding how one must prepare oneself prior to tefilla to create the proper environment for one's interaction with G-d based on the principle of "Hikkon likrat Eloekha Yisrael, Prepare to meet your G-d, Israel" (Amos 4:12; see Shabbat 10a).

Thus, tefilla is a stance, a position, a presentation, and a communication. It entails seeking and attaining some measure of contact with the Ribbono shel Olam. That contact is not simply an opportunity to present what we need. Rather, the very contact with the Ribbono shel Olam is itself meaningful

and purgative; it brings one to heights of experience and of personality that are otherwise beyond one's reach. Anyone who has had the experience of contact with a great person knows that a sense of greatness rubs off through that contact. That sense is infinitesimal compared to what is produced through contact with the Ribbono shel Olam!

Thus, a prayer for a particular response that fails to achieve that goal is not wasted or ineffective. There is merit and significance to the very turning to the Ribbono shel Olam, a deepening and intensification of one's sense of His presence. Prayer can be effective by ennobling and uplifting the one praying, by making him or her a better person and a better oved Hashem. In that respect, tefilla is efficacious even when, for whatever reasons, the Ribbono shel Olam chooses not to respond to our prayers in the way we had hoped.

But there is another level of efficacy as well. The verse tells us, "Tov lachasot ba-Hashem, It is good to be sheltered by G-d" (Tehillim 118:8). In what sense is this good? From a certain perspective, it is tov because it produces results. We believe that the possibility that our prayers will produce results is indeed there, and we turn, humbly and with an outstretched hand, imploring that we be given what we need. There is also, as stated above, a sense of "tov lachasot" that is not simply prudential and pragmatic, but rather spiritual and ennobling. Finally, there is a third sense of "tov lachasot" that straddles the line between the pragmatic and the idealistic.

One of the seven haftarot of consolation begins with the prophet speaking in G-d's name, "Anokhi, Anokhi Hu menachemkhem, I, even I, am your comforter" (Yeshayahu 51:12). The midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshaya, 474) expands upon this verse, explaining that there are times when no human comfort is available, even that of a mother or father-only Anokhi, Anokhi Hu menachemkhem. That sense of comfort derives in part from the sheer presence of the Ribbono shel Olam; it need not be verbalized by Him or by the human. People in need of comfort can be consoled through an embrace; often, in fact, such a gesture is more significant, more genuine, and more profound to a mourner than any statement that could be articulated in words. A hug is an expression of commiseration, of participation in pain, of empathy at its deepest level.

"Tov lachasot ba-Hashem"-there is goodness that results from the sheer presence of the Ribbono shel Olam. In our moments of greatest trial and need, in our hours of greatest crisis, His presence is comforting, to the same extent that it is humbling. In times of pain, prayer reminds us that our tower of strength is there, the source of being, the source of all good and all value and all worth. Much has been lost, but we have yet the Ribbono shel Olam- and that in and of itself is a source of sustenance and comfort. There is efficacy to prayer on a psychological level, above and beyond its practical and spiritual effects.

We are comforted when we turn to the Ribbono shel Olam in times of crisis, but He also sometimes turns to us to offer comfort, as it were. The midrashim describe that when we cry when tragedy strikes, the Ribbono shel Olam cries with us, kivyachol. When we transcend the anthropomorphic component of this description, we are left with the sense that our pain is not only our own; it is shared at the ultimate level by Malkhut Shamayim, by G-d Himself. "Ke-ish asher imo tinachmenu, ken anokhi anachemkhem, As a man is comforted by his mother, so shall I comfort you" (Yeshayahu 66:13). When a mother comforts her child who has suffered a terrible tragedy, she does not stand there dispassionately; her presence is comforting because she cries along with her child. The Ribbono shel Olam similarly comforts us with His "tears."

"Tov lachasot ba-Hashem" is a pillar of our faith and of our very existence. In that respect, tefilla is certainly efficacious-if we understand the ultimate purpose of prayer in all its fullness.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And G-d remembered Noach and all of the animals that were with him in the ark." (Beraishis 8:1) "What did He 'remember' regarding the animals? The merit of their not destroying their ways (by not mixing with other species) beforehand and that they did not cohabitate in the ark." (Rashi, *ibid.*) Rashi seems to be telling us that G-d was rewarding the animals for doing the right thing (or for not doing the wrong thing). In fact, the Midrash upon which this Rashi is likely based (Tanchuma Yashon, Noach 11) says, "Blessed is the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, who does not withhold (lit. smite) the reward of any creature. Therefore, He remembered them (the animals) with Noach." However, the concept of reward and punishment only applies to those who have free will, something the animal kingdom doesn't have (see Ramban). How could the animals have been remembered based on their "choices" if they really didn't have a choice?

This isn't the only time that Rashi tells us that about G-d rewarding animals. When the Torah tells us to feed the meat of any dead animal found in a field to the dogs (Sh'mos 22:30), Rashi says that this teaches us that "the Holy One, blessed is He does not withhold the reward of any creature," as this meat is reward for the dogs keeping still during the night of the exodus from Egypt. Malbim explains that even though animals do not have the ability to choose between right and wrong, and therefore cannot be deserving of reward, this meat is given to the dogs in order to teach humans that G-d always rewards those who do the right thing. The wording of the M'chilta upon which this Rashi is based (Mishpatim 20) seems to bear this out, as it adds, "if for an animal this is so, surely for a human He

will not withhold his reward." However, the wording of "not withholding reward" implies that the reward is deserved, and therefore not held back. If the "reward" for animals is not really deserved (but given for the benefit of the lesson humans can take from it being given), the Midrashim should say that G-d rewards all good deeds, not that He doesn't hold back the reward that was earned by any creature. Additionally, if the point of "remembering" the animals in their own merit (and not as a byproduct of remembering Noach) is to teach us this, Rashi should have used the same wording used in the M'chilta (and the Tanchuma), that this shows us that G-d doesn't withhold reward from any creature. Instead, Rashi just tells us which actions (or inactions) made the animals deserving of reward. So the original question still stands- how can creatures that do not have the ability to choose right over wrong be "deserving" of reward?

There are two aspects to the reward received for doing a mitzvah. One is the simple concept of reward, getting "paid" for doing good (or punished for doing bad), as a motivational tool. The other is the inherent benefit of doing good, how it leaves a lasting impression on the soul. For example, if two people go to the same shiur (Torah lecture), but one of them has to travel further to get there, assuming the same intellectual capability and attentiveness, they will both get the same benefit for having attended. The fact that one had to do more in order to attend might be an added incentive to accomplish as much as possible once there (so as not to waste the effort already put in), but unless G-d rewards the person who put in the extra effort by helping him understand it more, the extra effort will have no impact on what is gained from the lecture itself. There will be a separate calculation made regarding the effort put in to get there, with every little bit of extra effort bringing extra reward, but this has no direct bearing on the benefit received from the lecture itself. Similarly, one who wanted to attend but was unable to may not be held accountable for not attending, but will not receive any of the benefit he would have gained had he been able to go. While the effort put into doing a mitzvah will directly impact spiritual growth, the benefit from the mitzvah itself, the additional level of holiness realized, if done as well, is not diminished by the ease of doing it. One of the advantages of constantly doing mitzvos is that they become easier to do, without losing their value. Even if it no longer becomes a struggle to do the good deed, the spiritual advantage is still attained.

When Rashi tells us that the animals "deserved" to be remembered along with Noach, it is not because they "chose" to avoid improper activities. After all, animals do not have free will. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that these animals did not mix with other species (and most of them did not cohabitate in the ark), and therefore received the benefit of not suffering the same consequence as the other animals.

[The dogs not barking in Egypt is a bit more complex, especially since it was not the same dogs that didn't bark (which were in Egypt) that are being "rewarded." As I discussed last week (<http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-berashis-5773>), G-d doesn't change nature after He set it up, but embedded within it the "natural" ability to do things that are not usually part of their nature. This would have to include dogs having the ability to not bark despite all the dying that occurred when G-d smote the Egyptian firstborn. It can be suggested that just as G-d "put into the system" that dogs will bark when people are dying yet not bark in Egypt, He "put into the system" (read: the Torah) that dogs get meat they wouldn't have otherwise been given. This "reward" is really for the species, for following G-d's stipulation, made during the six days of creation, that they won't always bark, not for the individual dogs that didn't bark. We will therefore focus on the animals in the ark, which were the ones that did the right thing/didn't do the wrong thing, and were the same animals that were "remembered."]

Although not being corrupted as the rest of the animals were allowed the animals in the ark to escape from the flood, this "benefit" was really achieved when they first entered the ark; being "remembered" after they were already on it and had been saved from the flood implies that they merited something beyond not being wiped out with everything else. Noach was worthy of not only being spared, but of having the world rebuilt through him and his family. I would suggest that because these animals had not been adversely affected by the corrupt civilization, they were worthy of having the animal kingdom in the post-flood world rebuilt through them.

After everything was destroyed by the flood, the next step was beginning anew. Would things be any different this time? Would mankind stay the course, or veer off again? By attempting to build the Tower of Babel, mankind had failed again, and G-d had to scatter them and start again, this time through Avraham. It was worth saving Noach and his family not because mankind had learned its lesson, but because this beginning would produce an individual who would start a family which would become a nation that could fulfill G-d's purpose for creation ("[the world was created] because of Israel, which is referred to as a "beginning;" see Rashi on B'raishis 1:1). If the mistakes mankind would continue to make would affect the world around them just as it had before the flood, things wouldn't be much different this time either, and there would be no reason to try again after the flood. It was only because an Avraham would descend from Noach and Shem and the world wouldn't be as adversely affected by the rest of mankind sinning that there was a reason to try again. "And G-d remembered the animals that were with him in the ark," the animals that didn't become corrupt when mankind did, and were affected positively (for the most part) by what was left of mankind when they (for the

most part) followed G-d's instructions not to cohabit in the ark. These animals could replenish the animal kingdom in a way that made a new start worthwhile, and they were therefore remembered along with Noach (see B'raishis Rabbah, end of 33:1, which may be the Midrash that Rashi is based on). G-d "remembered" the actions/inactions of the animals too, and determined that they could leave the ark and try to build the world again. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Noach has G-d proclaiming Noach as being both a "Tzaddik" (righteous), and "Tamim" (perfect). What's tricky about that is that the term "Tzaddik" denotes a person that's been accused of something and has been proclaimed righteous, while the term "Tamim" describes a person that required no defense or exoneration. So which one was Noach?

In "Darash Moshe", Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that if you're an individual, working on yourself and no one else, your goal should be to perfect your actions and in using the guidelines of the Torah to achieve that perfection. However, if you're a leader, or in a position to influence others, many times that involves saying or doing things that can sometimes lead to allegations and accusations. For this reason, many people would rather stay away from communal affairs, and lead a quiet life. However, G-d told Noach and us that although Noach could have kept to himself and become perfect, He preferred that we stand up for the Torah even if it means facing opponents because of it. The biggest scholars of our past weren't known as Tamim, but as Tzaddikim (righteous people), because they stood for something. And the best way for us to achieve this goal is to find ONE Mitzvah (consider Sefer HaChinuch, Guard Your Tongue, learning Tanach, helping with shidduchim, outreach, aliyah, abused women and children, etc.) that we're willing to embrace and stand up for. By becoming a "mini-Tzaddik" in this one aspect, may we grow in rank, and one day become Tamim (perfect) Jews. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

