

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The praise that Noah is accorded is unparalleled anywhere in Tanakh. He was, says the Torah, “a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with G-d.” No such praise is given to Abraham or Moses or any of the prophets. The only person in the Bible who comes close is Job, described as “blameless and upright (tam ve-yashar); he feared G-d and shunned evil” (Job 1: 1). Noah is in fact the only individual in Tanakh described as righteous (tzaddik).

Yet the man we see at the end of his life is not the person we saw at the beginning. After the flood: Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. (Gen. 9: 20-23)

The man of G-d has become a man of the soil. The upright man has become a drunkard. The man clothed in virtue now lies naked and unashamed. The man who saved his family from the flood is now so undignified that two of his sons are ashamed to look at him. This is a tale of decline. Why?

Noah is the classic case of someone who is righteous but not a leader. In a disastrous age, when all has been corrupted, when the world is filled with violence, when even G-d himself – in the most poignant line in the whole Torah – “regretted that He had made man on earth, and He was pained to His very core,” Noah alone justifies G-d’s faith in humanity, the faith that led Him to create mankind in the first place. That is an immense achievement, and nothing should detract from it. Noah is, after all, the man through whom G-d makes a covenant with all humanity. Noah is to humanity what Abraham is to the Jewish people.

Noah was a good man in a bad age. But his

influence on the life of his contemporaries was apparently zero. That is implicit in G-d’s statement, “You alone have I found righteous in this whole generation.” It is implicit also in the fact that only Noah and his family, together with the animals, were saved. It is reasonable to assume that these two facts – Noah’s righteousness and his lack of influence on his contemporaries – are intimately related. Noah preserved his virtue by separating himself from his environment. That is how, in a world gone mad, he stayed sane.

The famous debate among the sages as to whether the phrase “perfect in his generations” is praise or criticism may well be related to this. Some said that “perfect in his generations” means, only relative to the low standard then prevailing. Had he lived in the generation of Abraham, they said, he would have been insignificant. Others said the opposite: if in a wicked generation Noah was righteous, how much greater he would have been in a generation with role models like Abraham.

The argument, it seems to me, turns on whether Noah’s isolation was part of his character – he was a loner – or merely a necessary tactic in that time and place. If he was naturally a loner he would not have gained by the presence of heroes like Abraham. He would have been impervious to influence whether for good or bad. If he was not a loner by nature but merely by circumstance, then in another age he would have sought out kindred spirits and become greater still.

Yet what exactly was Noah supposed to do? How could he have been an influence for good in a society bent on evil? Was he really meant to speak in an age when no one would listen? Sometimes people do not listen even to the voice of G-d himself. We had an example of this just two chapters earlier, when G-d warns Cain of the danger of his violent feelings toward Abel – “Why are you so furious? Why are you depressed? ... sin is crouching at the door. It lusts after you, but you can dominate it” (Gen. 4: 6-7). Yet Cain did not listen, and instead went on to murder his brother. If G-d speaks and men do not listen, how can we criticise Noah for not speaking when all the evidence suggests that they would not have listened either?

The Talmud raises this very question in a different context, in the years leading to the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple, another lawless age: R. Aha b. R. Hanina said: Never did a favourable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil,

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except the following, where it is written, "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (source). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, "Go and set a mark of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them." Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Sovereign of the Universe! How are these different from those?" "Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked," He replied. "Sovereign of the Universe!" said Justice, "they had the power to protest but did not." Said G-d, "It was fully known to them that had they protested they would not have heeded them." "Sovereign of the Universe!" said Justice, "If it was revealed to You, was it revealed to them?" Hence it is written, "[Slay] the old man, the young and the maiden, and little children and women; but do not come near any man on whom is the mark; and begin at my Sanctuary [mikdash]. Then they began at the elders which were before the house." R. Joseph said, "Read not mikdashi but mekuddashay [My sanctified ones]: this refers to the people who fulfilled the Torah from alef to tav." (Shabbat 55a)

According to this passage, even the righteous in Jerusalem were punished at the time of the destruction of the Temple because they did not protest the actions of their contemporaries. G-d objects to the claim of Justice: Why punish them for their failure to protest when it was clear that had they done so, no one would have listened? Justice replies: This may be clear to angels – translate this to mean, this may be clear in hindsight – but at the time, no human could have been sure that his words would have had no impact. Justice asks: How can you be sure you will fail if you never try?

According to the Talmud, G-d reluctantly agreed. Hence the strong principle: when bad things are happening in society, when corruption, violence and injustice prevail, it is our duty to register a protest, even if it seems likely that it will have no effect. Why? Because that is what moral integrity demands. Silence may be taken as consent. And besides, we can never be sure that no one will listen. Morality demands that we

ignore probability and focus on possibility. Perhaps someone will take notice and change his or her ways, and that "perhaps" is enough.

This idea did not suddenly appear for the first time in the Talmud. It is stated explicitly in the book of Ezekiel. This is what G-d says to the prophet: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezekiel 2: 3-5)

G-d tells the prophet to speak, regardless of whether people will listen.

So, one way of reading the story of Noah is as a failure of leadership. Noah was righteous but not a leader. He was a good man who had no influence on his environment. There are, to be sure, other ways of reading the story, but this seems to me the most straightforward. If so, then Noah is the third in a series of failures of responsibility. Adam and Eve failed to take personal responsibility for their actions ("It wasn't me"). Cain refused to take moral responsibility ("Am I my brother's keeper?"). Noah failed the test of collective responsibility.

This way of interpreting the story, if correct, entails a strong conclusion. We know that Judaism involves collective responsibility ("All Israel are responsible for one another"). But it may be that being human also involves collective responsibility. Not only are Jews responsible for one another. So are we all, regardless of our faith or lack of it. So, at any rate, Maimonides argued, though Nahmanides disagreed (Maimonides, Hilkhos Melakhim 9:14 Ramban, Commentary to Genesis 34: 13, s.v. Ve-rabbim).

Hassidim had a simple way of making the point. They called Noah a tzaddik im peltz, "a righteous man in a fur coat." There are two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a fur coat or light a fire. Wear a fur coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you warm others. We are supposed to light a fire.

Noah was a good man who was not a leader. Was he, after the Flood, haunted by guilt? Did he think of the lives he might have saved if only he had spoken out, whether to his contemporaries or to G-d? We cannot be sure. The text is suggestive but not conclusive.

It seems, though, that the Torah sets a high standard for the moral life. It is not enough to be righteous if that means turning our backs on a society that is guilty of wrongdoing. We must take a stand. We must protest. We must register dissent even if the probability of changing minds is small. That is because the moral life is a life we share with others. We are, in some sense, responsible for the society of which we are a part. It is not enough to be good. We must encourage

others to be good. There are times when each of us must lead. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13)

The rainbow is the symbol of the very first covenant entered into by G-d. It is the sign of G-d's covenant with the earth and with all of humanity. Noah, after all, was the second Adam, from whom all of humanity would now emerge. And G-d's covenant is His guarantee “that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.” What is the symbolic significance of this rainbow? How does this particular object in the sky – which apparently existed before G-d entered into the covenant and was now to become an expression of G-d's new agreement with “all flesh that is on the earth” – express this Divine covenant?

The Ramban (Nahmanides, 1194-1270) suggests that the rainbow in the sky is an inverted bow. Ancient warfare was fought with bows and arrows; when one side was ready to surrender, they would lift up an inverted bow, much as the white flag is a symbol of surrender today. The Ramban explains that the inverted bow in the skies is G-d's statement that He will never again send a flood or any other scourge from the heavens in order to destroy the flesh of the earth.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) provides what I believe is an even more profound symbolism. He explains that when one looks at a rainbow, one sees seven magnificent hues or colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. But there are not really those seven colors within the rainbow itself. When the rays of the sun touch the rain clouds – which are white – the refracted light which emanates from the rays appear to be these seven different glorious colors; in truth, however, the color is the white of the cloud and what we see are the virtual colors of the refracted light.

This phenomenon is a metaphor for the human race. People appear in many different colors. However, if we could look metaphysically within the human being, we all have same color: the color of the Divine Image which informs and inspires each and every one of us.

In order to truly understand the symbolism, we must realize that the rainbow is at best a half-symbol; the complete symbol would be a whole circle, comprising two halves together. Rabbi Hirsch would maintain that G-d chooses this half-symbol because He can only guarantee that He will not destroy the world; He cannot guarantee that the world will not destroy itself.

Hence, immediately before G-d presents the symbol of the rainbow, G-d permits human beings to eat animal flesh, but stipulates very clear limitations:

“You must not however eat the flesh or the blood of a living animal. You may not take your own life... or the life of any other human being. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; this is because G-d made man in His own image” (Genesis 9:4-6).

I have previously explained that a covenant is a two-way street, an agreement with the Divine which obligates the people as well as the Divine. Such was the covenant with Abraham “Between the Pieces” (Genesis 15) and so was the covenant at Sinai. Here too G-d obligates Himself not to destroy the world, but He also obligates humanity not to destroy itself.

Many of our traditional Jewish commentaries link these three laws to the Seven Noahide Laws of universal morality to which G-d obligates Noah and all human beings.

Tragically, humanity does not live up to these Seven Laws. The ten generations between Noah and Abraham proved to be disastrous for human history, with the debauchery of Sodom and Gomorrah setting the stage for human conduct. The Almighty (as it were) takes a new turn. He decides that He must deal with one specific nation – or rather one individual who will become a specific nation – rather than with all of humanity at once. He will deal with Abraham, who has already discovered G-d and His compassionate righteousness and moral justice on his own (Maimonides, Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 1).

He will build Abraham into a strong nation which will become “a blessing to all the families of the earth,” “a sacred nation and a kingdom of priests/teachers to all of humanity” (Genesis 12:3, Exodus 19:6, Sforno ad loc.).

This is our Divine charge, which will only be realized through a long historical process of transmitting our narrative from generation to generation. The true meaning of Zionism is the creation of the nation-state of Israel, which will serve as a beacon of peace, lighting the pathway to G-d for all the nations of the world.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion describes the famous story in Genesis of the great deluge that destroyed the earth. Why must the narrative tell us about the flood in such great detail? The Torah, very simply, could have told us that the world had turned to evil and that G-d had no other choice but to destroy all living things. Several answers come to mind.

When thinking about the deluge most of us conjure up an image of a G-d who is vengeful seeking to punish with great brutality the entire world. But the extent of the narrative indicates a very different message. Far from G-d being a G-d of retribution, the length of the descriptions teaches that G-d is a G-d of compassion who actually hesitated to destroy the world.

Thus Nehama Leibowitz divides the section prior to the flood into six paragraphs. The tedious discussion of what G-d goes through before allowing the waters to come down reveals a G-d who waits until the last instant to eradicate the world - hoping against hope that humankind would repent. Indeed, on the morning of the flood, the Torah says, "and rain (not a flood) was upon the earth." (7:12) Rashi tells us that the great flood began as only rain because, even at the last moment, if humanity would have repented G-d would have turned the waters into a rain of blessing.

It is noteworthy that there is a similar phenomenon that takes place in the narrative describing Noach's exit from the ark. The detailed and deliberate style may indicate an uncertainty on the part of Noach. Having experienced "the deluge," Noach hesitated to start over, wondering and worrying why he should exit and start the world anew. After all, more destruction could be around the corner. Note that G-d commands Noach to leave the ark with his wife so that he could cohabit and continue to live as a family. Noach, however, exits with his sons, while his wife leaves with their daughters-in-law as they could not fathom living together as husband and wife and continuing the human race. (Genesis 8:16,18)

One other thought. Maybe the flood narrative is extended to parallel the Genesis story, which is actually extremely similar to ours. Just as the world started with water, so too did water flood the earth. Just as G-d first created light, so too the only light in the world was in the ark itself. Just as the Torah details G-d's creation of animals, so too does the narrative detail Noach's taking the animals out of the ark. It is almost as if the world started all over again. Not coincidentally, after going forth from the ark G-d tells Noach that he should procreate, control the earth and be on a special diet. (Genesis 9:1-3) Blessings of procreation, control and diet were also given to Adam. (Genesis 1:28-29)

Yet, there is one significant difference between the creation story of Adam and of Noach. In the beginning G-d creates alone. When Noach leaves the ark to start beginning the world again, Noach participates in creation by immediately planting a vineyard.

The creation with Noach as a partner may be almost a repairing of the first version, where G-d alone created. Being given something and taking part in its creation are two different things. Once involved, one feels a sense of responsibility. For this reason Noach stands a greater chance of succeeding than Adam. And while soon after Noach the earth suffers in the dramatic incident of the Tower of Babel, still the earth is not destroyed as it was in the deluge. Progress had been made and still more progress would be made once Abraham and Sarah come on the scene.

One may claim that Noach failed in his task of creation, for the only mention of Noach after the flood is his becoming drunk. But it is not so simple. After

devastation it is not easy to begin again. In that sense, I would claim that Noach clearly succeeded. His creation was a resounding success even while it was done with complex feelings and emotions.

We similarly must understand the strength and commitment of those who went on after the Shoah to recreate as well. After witnessing destruction with their very eyes, so many assumed responsibility and rebuilt their lives in Israel and throughout the world. That is the type of creation that is truly everlasting. © 2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

After the destruction of civilization in the great flood a new generation arose and searched for a way to immortalize itself – so that their existence would withstand any new natural disasters. They gathered in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and there built the great city that would be called Nineveh. And to guarantee that their achievements would be forever remembered, they embarked on building a colossal structure – a great tower pointing towards - and seemingly even touching - the sky.

It was the first ancestor of our modern-day skyscrapers. This was the great technological leap forward in the discovery of creating bricks as a building material, which enabled such a project to be imagined and executed. The Torah specifically relates to us that the sole purpose of this tower soaring heavenward was "to build for us a name" – a remembrance, an eternal monument to human technology and ability that later generations would gaze upon in awe and admiration.

It was a testament to the human ego and its accompanying hubris. That is perhaps what Midrash is implying when it states that, ".....we will prop up the heavens" with this tower. They were saying that puny man could successfully defy G-d and nature and immortalize itself with its technological wonders and its insatiable ambitions.

Every dictator in history has sought to immortalize his achievements in stone and marble lest his greatness become unknown to future generations. Almost all of these memorials have failed to live up to their original purpose. The slaves who built the pyramids of Egypt are more well-known than are their pharoanic masters.

The Parthenon and Coliseum lie in ruins and Nineveh itself has long since disappeared from the map of the world. And the great twin towers of the World Trade Center of New York City are also no longer with us.

The irony of all of this is that none of the great architectural monuments of the ancient, medieval and modern world were felled by nature. There was no need

to prop up the heavens in order to save Nineveh from destruction. Nineveh and all of the other great monuments of the ancient world were all destroyed by human beings who were themselves bent upon creating their own eternal monuments to their own achievements.

It is part of the inborn competitive nature of human beings to attempt to destroy the immortality of others as a means of guaranteeing one's own immortality. Thus we continue to hound people who are already in the grave, searching for scandal and blame. The Torah itself tells us that the tower at Nineveh was never completed because people did not understand each other's language – basically, they could no longer cooperate one with the other.

The fractiousness and parochialism of humans towards each other is what truly stands in the way of human immortality. Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant summed up this lesson in his pithy remark: "Concern for the needs of others in this world is my entry ticket to the World to Come." Torah values and its observance coupled with good deeds, not physical monuments, are our guarantors in achieving immortality. © 2013 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

As I was walking out of the hospital after visiting a friend (and this week's piece, and the learning it brings about, is dedicated to the full and speedy recovery of Pinchas Michael ben Eidel, who-I have just been texted, as I am writing this very line-is being discharged from the hospital!), he asked me why a "b'ris," a covenant, was needed to ensure that the fruit Noach brought aboard the ark didn't spoil. Indeed, Rashi (B'reishis 6:18) tells us that a covenant was necessary so that the fruit wouldn't spoil and so that the wicked of the generation wouldn't kill Noach. There were many miraculous things that occurred in order to save Noach; why did these two things need a covenant?

The commentators discuss why Rashi (and by extension, the Midrash-B'reishis Rabbah 31:12) lists two things that needed a covenant if one should be enough to explain why the verse uses the word "covenant." They also discuss why Rashi didn't explain the "covenant" as saving Noach and his family from the flood (which is how Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban and Chizkuni explain it). The latter explanation works better from another perspective as well, as a covenant is an agreement between two parties. If it refers to saving Noach and his family, the agreement is that Noach will build an ark, gather the animals, and take care of them, and G-d will save them when He destroys the rest of the

world. But if it refers to G-d ensuring that the food won't spoil and the wicked won't kill Noach, how is it even referred to as a "covenant"? What was Noach required to do as part of this agreement?

Midrash HaGadol quotes Rabbi Elazar, who says that it refers to "the covenant of heaven and earth that they will not cease, as it says (Yirmiyah 33:25), 'if not for My covenant day and night, the laws of heaven and earth I would not have put in place.'" Although at first glance it seems that Rabbi Elazar is introducing a third possibility for what "the covenant" is referring to (food not spoiling/wicked not killing Noach, saving Noach, or maintaining the world), it could be suggested that Rashi (and the Midrash) did not mean that there was a new, separate, covenant enacted regarding the food and protection, but were explaining why a previously enacted covenant (that the world would exist) had to be referenced; the only way to keep the covenant to maintain the world is if the food on the ark doesn't spoil and the wicked don't kill the only righteous person through whom the world would be saved.

The wording used by Rashi ("a covenant is necessary") and by the Midrash ("you need a covenant") fits very well, as in order to get into the ark (6:18) without being killed first, G-d must suspend natural law (wild animals that didn't make it onto the ark-other members of their species did-protected Noach from his potential murderers, see Rashi on 7:13 and B'reishis 32:8). Similarly, in order for the food not to spoil even a year after being harvested (so that there would be enough to feed all of the ark's inhabitants, see 6:21), nature must be put on hold. G-d had decreed that His natural law would not be suspended, that He would always work within it (see <http://tinyurl.com/k2w95kx/>), but had also made a covenant with His creations that they would not be negated-so something had to give. The covenant took precedence, thereby requiring that natural law be suspended. Noach "needed" the covenant to trump natural law in order to enter the ark and have enough food for his family and the animals.

There is one small item that still needs to be explained (besides going "outside the box" so as not to disappoint Pinny); Rabbi Elazar, whom Midrash HaGadol quotes, usually explains that very same verse to mean that without Torah ("His covenant"), the world would stop working (see P'sachim 68b). How can he say that the verse means that the world cannot end if he usually explains it to mean that the world would end if the Torah is not being studied/kept?

One of the recurring themes in Rabbi Moshe Shamah's "Recalling the Covenant" (a wonderful book if you can get past his quoting sources that are on the "do not read" list, his considering Chazal's approaches to explain things as "possibilities," and some occasional heresy) is Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon's work on number symbolism in the Torah. For example, the number seven represents "completeness," particularly regarding concepts that applied before the Torah was

given. Once the Torah was given, though, it was "superseded" by the number eight, which "became the signifier of the covenant." The word "covenant" appears in the flood narrative eight times, once before the flood (the verse under discussion) and seven times after the flood (regarding the "rainbow"). Even working within his parameters, several things seems strange. First of all, since the entire narrative occurred well before the Torah was given, why would there be a hint to a "post-covenant" status? Secondly, when the number seven, representing pre-Torah concepts, is transformed into post-Torah concepts represented by the number eight, it's usually accomplished by starting with seven and adding one more to complete the transformation. Here, however, we start with one (before the flood) and then add seven afterwards; it's not a seven being transformed into eight but a one becoming eight. Additionally, the whole idea of the number of times a word appearing coming to signify the covenant is rather awkward when the very word being used is the word "covenant." Why would we need the number of times the word is used to hint to us about a covenant if the word itself means covenant?

The "covenant" under discussion after the flood, represented by the rainbow, signified that G-d will not bring another flood to destroy the world (9:11), that things will operate as they were intended (see 8:21-22). The natural order has been restored, and it will stay that way—a notion that fits very well with the number seven. It is therefore appropriate for the word covenant to appear seven times after the flood. Before the flood, however, whether the world was worth saving was still up for discussion (as it were), with Noach's righteousness, his connecting with the One True G-d, being what allowed the world to be saved. But it wasn't Noach's personal righteousness that saved the world, it was that he would have progeny that would be worthy of receiving the Torah. Just as the world was created "because of the Torah" and "because of Israel" (see Rashi on 1:1), it was saved, and allowed a fresh start, because of the Torah and because of Israel. As Rabbi Chanina bar Papa says (B'reishis Rabbah, towards the end of 26:6), "even Noach did not remain because he was worthy; rather, G-d saw that Moshe would descend from him." It was because the person who would receive the Torah on Israel's behalf and give it over to them would come from him that Noach, and the world, was saved. This is hinted at by using the word "covenant" before the flood, turning the seven times it was mentioned into eight, signifying the Torah.

The eighth occurrence had to be before the flood, because it signifies the reason Noach was being saved from it. Therefore, on a "remez" level, the word "covenant" had to be used. Rashi, however, is not working on the "remez" level, so explains the covenant mentioned before the flood on a "p'shat" level. He is uncomfortable with the explanation given by the other Rishonim, as we do not find that there was a "covenant"

regarding being saved from the flood, nor should one be necessary. Since it was in the merit of the Torah (that would be given through his progeny) that Noach was saved, the explanation of the verse in Yirmiyah given by Rabbi Elazar that is quoted in the Talmud, that without Torah there will be no world, applies. But so does the reverse; since the Torah will be given to Israel, the world must exist so that it can given. And once the world must exist so that the Torah, G-d's covenant with His people, can be given, the natural laws must be suspended so that the food won't spoil on the ark and so that Noach won't be killed before he boards it. "[Noach] needed the covenant," i.e. the Torah, "so that the fruit wouldn't spoil and the wicked wouldn't kill him," for without it, G-d wouldn't have suspended natural law.

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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 no specific 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 haftarah, "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. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Noach, the Torah introduces the episode of the building of the Tower of Babel with a description of the building materials which were used. Rashi comments that since Babel was a plain, having no mountains and rocks, the inhabitants of the area were forced to manufacture their own bricks. Of what significance is this information to the overall understanding of the entire episode?

Rashi comments on the verse "of common purpose" that the inhabitants of Babel conspired against the notion that G-d is the sole power over the entire universe. It was their perception that the world was theirs, devoid of Divine authority, and they conspired to attack the authority that resided in the heavens. The reason for the emphasis on the brick being used as a building material is succinctly captured by the Ibn Ezra who comments on the verse "and the brick served them as stone", saying that they used bricks instead of stone. Their preference for bricks reflected their perception that they were living in a world which they themselves created (when a person bakes bricks, using them to construct his home, they may have the feeling that their abode is separate from Hashem, for they themselves have processed the materials used to construct it). They deluded themselves into believing that Hashem no longer exercised His authority over this world.

All too often, we ourselves become blinded by mankind's technological advancements. As man progresses in his technological pursuits, he becomes more prone to losing sight of the fact that G-d is the ultimate authority in this world. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Noach. "Noach was a righteous man... And the world was in a (spiritually) destroyed state... And Hashem said to Noach: 'The (time for the) end of mankind has come before me. Make an ark, three hundred cubits long... three stories high... I will bring a flood onto the land that will destroy all flesh... You, your sons, your wife and their wives will enter the ark along with (a minimum of) two from each species...' [6:9-19]"

Rashi [6:14] points out that Hashem had all of the options to choose from when He decided to destroy the world and save Noach. Why then did Hashem choose a flood and an ark which necessitated this arduous construction project? He explains that Hashem wanted that generation to see Noach spending 120 years building this ark. They would thus realize that Hashem was planning to destroy the world and would have the chance to repent.

"And Noach did all that Elokim had commanded him. [6:22]" Rashi: This is (referring to) the building of the ark.

The very next passuk has Hashem once again speaking to Noach and commanding him to enter the ark. A split-second pause in our reading but actually a 120-year interval. Amazing. The Torah doesn't record any further communication between those two points. Hashem spoke to him, told him to build the ark and then spoke again 120 years later to tell him it's time to enter!

The long, cold winter follows the warmth of inspiration and focus that was felt during the holidays. Decisions were reached, commitments were made but it's hard to take it through the long run. Things that we decided should become history seem to resurface as current events. Those are the thoughts that were racing through my mind when I was struck by Noach's perseverance throughout not the twenty days that have passed since Yom Kippur but 120-years!

What can we do to try to lock in our commitments and ideals?

The Prophets [Shmuel I 17-25] tell a fascinating story. Shaul HaMelech {King Saul} had promised the hand of his daughter in marriage to whoever would defeat Galyas {Goliath} in battle. When Dovid {David} killed Galyas, Shaul, after much delaying, gave his daughter Michal to Dovid as a wife. However, Shaul's jealousy eventually led to many attempts on Dovid's life.

In one instance, Shaul had his men surround their house. Michal tipped off Dovid and helped him

escape out the window. She then set up a dummy in bed and told her father's messengers that Dovid was too ill to come out, thus affording him the necessary time to escape.

Ultimately, Shaul erroneously claimed that Dovid's marriage to Michal had been invalid and gave Michal away as a wife to Palti ben Layish.

Shlomo HaMelech {King Solomon} taught in Mishlei: "Sheker ha'chein {Charm is false} v'hevel ha'yofee {and beauty is vain}, ishah yir'as Hashem hee tis'hallal {a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised}. [Proverbs 31:29]"

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 20A] reveals a deeper level upon which this passuk {verse} can be understood. "Charm is false" refers to Yosef and his withstanding the seduction of Potiphar's wife; "and beauty is vain" refers to Boaz and his not having relations with Ruth; "a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised" refers to Palti ben Layish.

Palti was faced with a seemingly impossible test. He and a beautiful, married woman were living in the same house. This wasn't a one-time urge that he would have to overcome but a test that would last for many years.

How did he do it? How did he overcome this gargantuan test and thus surpass even Yosef and Boaz in greatness?

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 19B] teaches that he plunged a sword (into the bed) between himself and Michal and said: Whoever deals with 'that matter' (meaning relations) should be stabbed by this sword.

What did this sword accomplish? Couldn't it simply be removed at a later point?

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l explains that Palti knew that the strong conviction he now felt would get dulled with time. He therefore turned that feeling into an action that would remain, giving himself a permanent, tangible manifestation of the powerful feelings of conviction he was then experiencing.

Palti's actions teach that decisions and convictions don't go the distance. A concrete act must be done in order to 'lock-in' those feelings. To keep the warmth of the holidays throughout these long winter months. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

