

HASHEM'S HONOR, NOT YOUR OWN

Our holy Torah states that Nimrod “began to be a mighty man upon the earth... a mighty hunter before the L-RD (Genesis 10:8-9). The Sages explain this to mean that Nimrod “ensnared people” by his words (Bereshith Rabba 37:2), for he wanted to rebel against G-d. In fact Nimrod eventually managed to ensnare everyone at the time when “all the earth was of one language and the same words” (Genesis 11:1). Not only were they united against the Holy One, blessed be He, but they were also under Nimrod’s control, with Scripture telling us that his domination began at Babel (ibid. 10:10). This is very surprising, for how could it be that everyone was united and did not speak Lashon Harah about one another, yet they spoke Lashon Harah about the Holy One, blessed be He, because of the flood? When unity exists between two people, they end up acknowledging Hashem. Yet in the case of the generation of the dispersion, they ended up rebelling against the King of the entire earth, even taking Nimrod as their king to revolt against Him!

I thought I would explain this by looking to the words of the Sages for inspiration. They tell us: “Terah was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came and wished to buy one. ‘How old are you?’ Abraham asked him. ‘Fifty years,’ was the reply. ‘Woe to such a man!’ he exclaimed. ‘You are 50 years old and would worship a day-old object!’ At this he became ashamed and departed” (Bereshith Rabba 38:13). There are other stories like this as well. Terah knew in his heart that idols had eyes but could not see, that they had ears but could not hear. He knew that they were simply made by man. Yet despite realizing that there was no truth to them, and despite the fact that he did not believe in them, he allowed himself to get swayed by the prospect of personal gain, since he sold these idols for great profit. This shows us that a person is liable to reach a point at which he actually believes in Hashem, yet he will ignore the truth due to personal interests or for reasons of honor and gain. He then reaches a state in which “love upsets the natural order, and hate upsets the natural order” (Bereshith Rabba 55:8).

We learn a great principle from this, which is that a person cannot love Hashem and honor Him with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might if he also loves himself, honors himself, and worries about his own honor! Furthermore, a person cannot love and respect the Torah if he loves money and personal glory. Why is that? It is because the Torah “is not found among merchants or peddlers” (Eruvin 55a). That is, it cannot be acquired with money. Instead, it can only be acquired by one who abases himself and yields to it (see Berachot 63b; Taanith 7a). If a person loves money and personal glory, how can he annul and lower himself before the Torah? Abraham’s service of Hashem consisted of just that, following His ways to the point that his innards taught him wisdom and Torah (Bereshith Rabba 61:1;

95:3). Abraham never sought person glory, but instead all he yearned for was increasing the glory of Heaven! This is why he overcame every trial he went through, demonstrating the tremendous power of his love for Hashem. He reached a point at which he was truly able to give his life to sanctify His Name, so much did he love Him.

It follows that there exists a fundamental difference between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked are only concerned with their own personal gain and glory, which is why they try to show that they are in control, as Nimrod did. This is not the case with the righteous, who are only concerned with G-d’s honor and are prepared to suffer and endure humiliation for it. Even when the world respects them, the righteous remain humble, for their only desire is to increase the glory of Heaven. Such was the case with Abraham, who gave no thought to personal honor, but instead was constantly concerned with increasing the honor of Heaven and bringing people closer to G-d, since he did everything for His sake with love.

There is a tremendous difference between a person who is only concerned with his own honor, and one who is sincerely concerned with the honor of Heaven. The former cares only about himself and his money, with all his deeds being geared to that end. Even if he teaches Torah and encourages others to perform mitzvot, it is only with his own interest in mind that he does so. He turns the Torah into an instrument for person gain, taking the honor of the Torah for himself. Such a person is like Nimrod, who assembled his entire generation together as one, yet in his heart sought only his own glory. In fact if the unity of his generation had been real, they would have continued to serve Hashem in truth.

Such is not the case with righteous individuals, who actually do love Hashem. When someone truly loves Him and works for His glory with all his heart, this enables him to arrive at “with all your soul,” for his entire life is devoted exclusively to Heaven. Furthermore, such a person is constantly prepared to give his life for the glory of Hashem. Hence it follows that he is constantly giving his life for the sanctification of His Name, as it is written: “Because for Your sake we are killed all the time” (Psalms 44:23). Of such a person we can say that he is a true servant – with all his heart and all his soul – of Hashem, and from him we must learn a lesson for our personal and social lives. That is, when we love ourselves and our money, when we seek out personal honor, then not only will we be left with nothing as honor flees from us, we will also be unable to love Hashem. In that case, how can we serve Him? Therefore we must first and foremost love Hashem, after which honor will come, for Hashem loves those who love Him and grants them an abundance of blessing and success.

The Path To Follow Noah

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Guard Your Tongue!

The Power of Speech

It is forbidden to benefit from anything, be it even the value of a perutah, that is hekdesch (devoted to the Temple), and if anyone does benefit from it, he must bring an offering. If a man gives something to a woman and says to her, “You are consecrated to me,” she becomes his wife and is forbidden to everyone except him. The same applies to vows and oaths, for they are dependent upon the power of speech, of which it is stated: “He shall not profane his word” (Numbers 30:3). With regards to an idol, even if a person did nothing but to say to it, “You are my god,” this constitutes complete idolatry and is punishable by death (Sanhedrin 60b). Thus the power of speech places every Jew in a very lofty position, and he must carefully weigh each word that comes from his mouth, for they are all heard above.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Whoever Sheds the Blood of Man

It is written, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6).

This concept comes naturally to anyone with common sense, namely that murder is something repulsive and depraved. That being the case, why does the Torah find it necessary to provide us with a reason for not murdering by stating, "For in the image of G-d He made man"? The reason is that the Torah is aware of the weakness inherent in human reasoning. It knows that a person should not trust what he feels is right. Although murder is abhorrent and far removed from his thoughts, all a person needs is but a slight interest – be it desire, jealousy or ambition – to become capable of justifying murder with all kinds of reasons. At that point his instinctive distaste for such a heinous act will not come to his rescue, which is why the Torah prohibits murder by actually stating that man was made "in the image of G-d," an image that every murder degrades. From this we learn that without a fear of G-d, we cannot place our trust in human reasoning, for as Abraham said: "The fear of G-d is not in this place, and they will kill me" (Genesis 20:11). The Sages allude to this concept by stating, "A man's evil inclination grows in strength from day to day...and were it not for the help of the Holy One, blessed be He, he would not be able to withstand it" (Sukkah 52b). This means that the power of a man's evil inclination is greater than his natural and intellectual strengths, which are meant to distance him from all heinous deeds. Hence left on his own, "He would not be able to withstand it." There is only one thing that enables a person to withstand the evil inclination, this being the fear of Heaven. The Holy One, blessed be He, comes to his aid, for it is not by his own strength, but by the fear of G-d – whose power is found outside himself, beyond his own body and outside of his abilities – that a person prevails. Only the fear of the prohibition, "You shall not kill" can prevent a person from committing murder in any given situation. Rabbi Akiva explained that whoever sheds blood is considered to have degraded G-d's image. Furthermore, our sacred books have explained the concept behind man being made in G-d's image, namely that it is His attributes and ways that are implanted in man. Since the Creator has no body, what other image could this refer to? It must therefore be speaking of Hashem's attributes and ways. The masters of Mussar have explained that each man is endowed with a unique set of characteristics. Reuven possesses what Shimon does not, and likewise Shimon possesses what Reuven does not. Hence through the union of all men, the image of G-d becomes complete. This is why the death of one person is so serious. The murder of a single individual means that not only is something lacking among the mass of divine images, but that the divine image as a whole is degraded. No one else is comparable to the murdered person, and none can fill his role in completing the image of G-d above.

A Tree Planted Elsewhere

It is written, "Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with G-d" (Genesis 6:9).

Rashi states, "There are those among our Sages who interpret this to his praise: Certainly had he lived in a righteous generation, he would have been [even] more righteous. There are others who interpret this to his discredit: Relative to his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered significant" (see Sanhedrin 108a).

The Author of Taamei D'Kra quotes the Chazon Ish in stating that there is no contradiction between the two opinions cited by Rashi. Everyone thought that Noah would not have been significant in Abraham's generation, just as they thought that Noah was very great in his own generation. So why is there a difference of opinion? An opinion evaluates things in the context of how they actually are. When a tree is planted in a harsh environment and only grows to half its normal height, some people may view it as a disappointment. Others may point out that it could have grown to its full height if planted in a suitable environment. Although true, the fact remains that it was not planted in a suitable

environment! Hence those who interpret Scripture's statement concerning Noah to his credit are saying that in a generation such as his, he still managed to be righteous. However those who interpret it to his discredit are saying that, compared to Abraham's generation, he was not significant. Note that there is no discussion of Noah per se, for the issue at hand is what the Torah really means by stating "in his generation." That is, should Noah be considered as he really was (meaning a righteous man) or as he would have been in Abraham's generation (meaning not significant)? Alternatively, Scripture could be saying that Noah was great even in his own generation. Thus the question becomes, is Scripture saying "even in his generation" or "only in his generation"?

The Wisdom of Former Times

It is written, "The earth had become corrupt before G-d, and the earth had become filled with violence. ...G-d said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence' " (Genesis 6:11,13).

The book Otzar Chaim cites Rabbi Chaim of Krasna as saying that in former times, chochma (wisdom) represented the initials of Chilumipantav kol ha'aretz: "Tremble before Him, all the earth" (Psalms 96:9). Today, however, it represents the initials of Kimala ha'aretz chamas: "For the earth is filled with violence."

Like Noah's Ark

It is written, "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make the ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch" (Genesis 6:14).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch arrived in a certain town that did not have a synagogue. The only thing he could find was a Reform temple, which as we know looks like a church.

Those inside the temple asked Rabbi Hirsch to come and pray with them, but he was adamant about praying outside. Thus the congregants went out to pray with him. Next they asked him to come inside and give his opinion on their temple. He replied, "It is written, 'Cover it inside and out with pitch [kopher].' Heresy [kephira] is present here inside and out [a reference to the views on the inside of their temple and its appearance on the outside]. This is like the time of the flood, except for one thing: Noah and humanity were saved from the waters for all time. As for you, I don't think that you'll be saved."

The Gates of the Garden of Eden

It is written, "The dove came back to him in the evening. And behold: An olive leaf it had plucked with its bill! So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth" (Genesis 8:11).

From where did the dove bring an olive leaf? The Sages said that it came from the Garden of Eden. However the Ramban states: "If that were so, then Noah did not know that the 'the waters had subsided from the earth,' for there [in Eden] the waters of the flood did not enter. Yet perhaps its gates were closed so that the waters did not enter there, but when the waters subsided they were opened." Nobody contests that the world of today is like the flood, nor does anybody contest that yeshivot are like the Garden of Eden. Nevertheless we must realize that if we open the gates of the Garden of Eden to the waters of the world, the inside will be flooded. Not only is this true of our yeshivot, but of our homes as well. Each of us tries to establish a home that is like a wall against the flood that exits on the outside. We must know how to close ourselves to the world; otherwise we will be flooded.

The Blood of Man By Man

It is written, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of G-d He made man" (Genesis 9:6).

The holy Alsheich explains this verse on the basis of humiliating someone in public. Though blood is not shed on the outside, much blood is shed on the inside of a person. – Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha deals with the decline of humanity, recounting events prior to and after the flood. It describes humanity's new beginning from those who emerged from the Ark until the appearance of a select few, meaning from Noah

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Permission to Eat Meat

It is written, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Genesis 9:3).

Rashi explains this to mean: “I did not permit meat to the first man, but only vegetables. As for you, just as the vegetables that I allowed to the first man, so have I given you everything.” Noah emerged from the Ark into a new world, and on that very day both he and his descendants were given permission to eat the flesh of animals. This was a revolution in the world order, for up to that point they were vegetarians by nature.

Why did Noah receive this order as early as the first day he emerged from the Ark, and how is it that this permission carried with it the hope that mankind would become more humane than the generation of the flood?

In the world that preceded the flood, people were vegetarians by Heavenly decree. They did not harm animals, nor did they eat their flesh. Thus peace reigned among the various parts of Creation. However there was an inherent disadvantage to this, for man felt at ease within the animal kingdom surrounding him. In fact he felt too much at ease, and this peace and harmony eventually led to a blurring of the lines that separated humans from other creatures.

Life in common with animals brought about a lessening of the specific domains of each. This led humans to consider themselves as being (at the very most) first among equals, which in turn led to humanity’s decline before the flood. People began to do whatever they felt like doing, allowing their desires to run rampant. Thus within a few generations the entire world found itself in the depths of the flood. This is why G-d established a clear boundary between man and beast, a line of demarcation that reestablished man’s dominion upon the earth and made his supremacy over the surroundings perfectly clear to him.

From that time on, there has been a clear boundary to sharply separate the various domains of Creation, to mankind’s advantage. This is why G-d said, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you,” constituting a true revolution in the world order. Noah was a remnant from the vegetarian world, and he had to get used to the idea that he was now permitted to kill animals to eat their flesh.

Did G-d do this in order to establish cruelty in the world?

The commentators teach that the permission to eat meat was designed to infuse man with a realization of his supremacy over animals. With every fiber of his being he must know that he is completely different, thus preserving his uniqueness as a human being. Such a revolution in the world order was necessary and inevitable.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Power of Women in Every Generation

In every generation, at the root of everything that is good among the Jewish people and exceptional individuals, we discover the great power of women. We have Eve, the mother of all the living; Sarah, the mother of prophesy; Rebecca, the mother of blessings; Rachel, the mother of tears for the exile; Leah, the mother of priesthood and kingship; Miriam, the mother of deliverance; the women of the desert, the mothers of sincere faith; Deborah, the mother of spiritual power and courage; Ruth, the mother of royalty; and Esther, the mother of deliverance. When darkness fell upon the land of Israel as it was being attacked by brazen invaders who overran and defiled the Temple – those who tried to uproot the Torah from among the people and destroy it – Chana the mother of seven taught the people to sanctify Hashem’s Name, giving her life for Him in the process. Who are the mothers of the light of Mashiach? They are the righteous and upright women of our time.

to Abraham. The deterioration of human conduct continued until “the earth was filled with violence,” and Hashem decided to wipe humanity off the face of the earth. Commanding Noah to build an Ark, Hashem sent a flood that destroyed everything on earth, leaving the last vestiges of life on the Ark. When Noah and his family emerged from it, the renewal of the earth began with the construction of an altar and the offering of sacrifices to Hashem, Who said that He would no longer curse the earth. G-d gave His word that He would never again wipe out all living things as He had done, establishing a covenant to that effect. The sign of this covenant, visible for all to see, is the rainbow. G-d also declared that the seasons would continue for as long as the earth endured and that man would have dominion over animals. When Noah returned to living upon the earth, he planted a vineyard, drank its wine, and unclothed himself. Following the actions of his sons when they found him uncovered, Noah blessed Shem and Japheth but cursed Canaan, the son of Ham, condemning him to be enslaved to his brothers. After the death of Noah, the parsha lists the 70 nations that descended from him, people who wanted to make a name for themselves by constructing the Tower of Babel. Hence they journeyed from the east and settled in the land of Shinar so as not to be scattered upon the earth. After listing Noah’s descendants and what happened to them, the parsha deals with Shem’s descendents down to the children of Terah, Shem being the ancestor of Israel, the bearers of G-d’s Name. We are then told of Terah’s household and his departure from Ur of the Chaldees toward the land of Canaan. This is followed by an account of Terah’s death in Haran, which serves as an introduction to Abraham, the main subject of the following parsha.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

A Brief Moment

It is written, “For but a brief moment have I forsaken you, and with abundant mercy will I assemble you” (Isaiah 54:7).

This verse must be understood figuratively, as our Sages said: “These are the words of the Torah, which are as hard to acquire as vessels of fine gold, and which are as easily destroyed as vessels of glass” (Chagigah 15a). This is precisely what our verse is telling us: “For but a brief moment have I forsaken you” – it is unfortunately very easy to be abandoned and far from Hashem, since He and the Torah are one (as the holy Zohar says on Parsha Acharai Mot). Yet “with abundant mercy will I assemble you” – it takes great divine mercy and a good deal of effort to return to the Torah and regain its knowledge. The Talmud states, “What must a man do that he may become wise? ...Let him engage much in study and little in business. ...Let [him] pray for mercy from Him to Whom wisdom belongs, for it is said, ‘For the L-RD grants wisdom. From His mouth comes knowledge and understanding’ [Proverbs 2:6]” (Niddah 70).

We can also explain our Haftorah according to what is said concerning the verse, “G-d is angered every day” (Psalms 7:11). Our Sages said, “How long does His anger last? One moment. And how long is one moment? ...As long as it takes to say rega” (Berachot 7a), a three-letter word. Now although Bilam the son of Beor knew when that moment occurred, Tosaphot ask how he could have cursed Israel in such a brief instant. They answer that Bilam wanted to utter the word kalem (“destroy them”), but Hashem rearranged its letters so that he actually said melech (“king”): “The L-RD his G-d is with him, and the shout of a king is in him” (Numbers 23:21). This is what the verse in our Haftorah is saying: “For but a brief moment have I forsaken you” – for a brief instant of anger I forsook you – yet “with abundant mercy will I assemble” – I will assemble the letters of kalem into the word melech.

A TRUE STORY

Grabbing Hold of Reb Aharon's Coat

It is written, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth" (Genesis 9:2).

Rabbi Aharon Kotler Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kletzk, lived in a house that was located far from the yeshiva. One day it happened that two boys (who were staying at Rabbi Aharon's home) got involved in a Torah conversation with him, when suddenly they realized that not much time remained before the yeshiva's next study session. Rabbi Aharon hurried to leave, asking the boys if they wanted to walk with him along the path that he normally took. Although they were afraid of the ferocious and menacing dogs that they were sure to encounter along the way, they felt that they could not refuse the Rav's offer. Hence they went with him and passed yard by yard, until finally they came to one yard where they saw several large, mean-looking dogs. There the boys stopped and said to the Rosh Yeshiva, "We can't go any further because we're afraid of these dogs – they can kill people!" Rabbi Aharon turned his eyes to them and said, "If you're afraid, grab hold of my coat and follow me. You'll have nothing to fear." The boys listened to him, and they each grabbed the hem of his coat. They then crossed the yard while the dogs remained completely silent.

(Drawn from She'al Avicha VeYagedcha, Part I)

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira

The Author of Chovat HaTalmidim

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira was a righteous and holy man. The son of Rabbi Elimelech, the Rebbe of Grodzisk, he was born on Iyar 19, 5649 in the city of Grodzisk. Losing his father when he was only three years old, his mother (the daughter of the Maor VaShemesh) took care of his education. From an early age people were aware of his noble and majestic conduct, and when he was 13 years old he married the daughter of Rabbi Yerachmiel Moshe of Kozhnitz. Upon the latter's death in 5669, Rabbi Kalonymus assumed his position. However soon afterwards he settled in Piaseczno, the town whose name he carried as the Rebbe of Piaseczno and where he remained for much of his time. The doors of his home were open to everyone, and even in the middle of the night he warmly welcomed people as if it were daytime. During the Holocaust he went to Warsaw, and there the Germans pursued him in their search for "the holy rebbe." His only son was injured by a bomb and later died from his injuries, while his daughter-in-law (who was staying near the hospital where her husband was recuperating) was also struck by a bomb and died instantly.

Rabbi Kalonymus held out for several years, until eventually the Warsaw Ghetto was liquidated and he was deported to a camp near Lublin, being murdered there on Heshvan 4, 5704. May Hashem avenge his blood. Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira is best known for Chovat HaTalmidim ("The Duties of Students"), an important book in which he offers guidance to young students in serving G-d.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

The Intelligence of Man and the Torah

It is written, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence" (Genesis 6:13). Although the generation of the flood also committed serious sins, Rashi cites the Sages in saying that "their fate was sealed only because of robbery" (see Sanhedrin 108a). The Ramban says that the reason for this is "because the prohibition against violence is a rational commandment, there being no need for a prophet to admonish them against it." He also states: "The punishment decreed upon them was only because of violence, since this is a reasoned concept and does not require the Torah to prohibit it" (Ramban on Genesis 6:2). In the book Chovot HaLevavot (Sha'ar Avodat HaElokim), it is stated that not only are there commandments that people should derive intellectually – not from what the Torah tells them – but that all the instructions of the Torah are only meant to help a person reach the level at which man's intelligence becomes the intelligence of the Torah, at which point they will be in harmony. The Sages say something similar to this in commenting on the beginning of the book of Psalms: "Happy is the man...[whose] desire is in the Torah of the L-RD, and in his Torah he mediates day and night" (Psalms 1:1-2). Here Rashi cites the Sages in saying that at first it is "the Torah of the L-RD," yet afterwards it becomes "his Torah" (Kiddushin 32b). From this we learn that laboring in Torah means not only studying it, but also arriving at the goal of the Torah. It is only by laborious effort that man's intelligence can be shaped until it becomes identical to that of the Torah. Hence when a child or youngster asks an unusual question, or one whose answer is beyond his comprehension, he should not be told: "We don't ask questions like that." In Torah learning there is no reason to fear questions, since the Torah represents truth. The answer to such a question should be, "You've asked a difficult question, and the answer is very complex. When your level of understanding increases, don't forget to ask this question again!" Silencing a question closes the path to greatness, wherein the Torah is acknowledged as a Torah of life. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote, "The enormous mistake made in learning Torah is that we have removed life from the Torah. Hence the Torah has been removed from life."