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The Path to Follow

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THE YOKE OF TORAH: THE CURE FOR EVERY ILLNESS

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Vayachel [And he began] Noah, man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent" (Bereshith 9:20-21).

After the devastating flood that inundated the earth, Noah left the Ark, planted a vineyard, and became drunk. Rashi states that the term *vayachel* ("and he began") is connected to the term *chullin* ("profane"). As such, the Torah criticizes Noah for having "become profane" by planting a vineyard and becoming drunk.

Let's analyze this allusion in the Torah regarding Noah, a man who turned to wine immediately after the flood ended. Let's try to understand what pushed this "righteous man" – as the verse describes him at the start of this week's parsha (Bereshith 6:9) – to get drunk as soon as he left the Ark. In reality, if we look a little closer at the life that Noah led while in the Ark, it turns out (according to the explanations of our Sages) that he was far from idle. Noah did not *nach* ("rest"), for he was constantly working at the laborious task of feeding all the animals, respecting the feeding time and quantity for every animal's meal. If he was late in feeding a given animal, it would get angry; indeed, the lion once bit Noah because he forgot to bring him a meal on time. Furthermore, Noah was a righteous and upright man, constantly busy with Torah and mitzvot. That being the case, we see that feeding all the animals and being responsible for them was a very heavy burden.

Despite having been rescued from the flood, Noah remained almost alone in the world and lived through an extremely difficult time. Now when a person finds himself in a difficult situation or is afflicted with suffering, he must immediately examine his deeds in order to determine the cause. Why did Noah, this righteous man who certainly searched his soul in a meticulous way, have to suffer so many trials in the Ark in order to be rescued from the flood? He probably reached the same conclusion as our Sages, which is that he could have influenced people and saved the world from destruction by encouraging men to repent. Because he failed to do so, however, he was punished with the task of having to carry out heavy work. We find an allusion to this in the text itself, which states: *Vayiven Noah* ("And Noah built" [Bereshith 8:20]), which means that Noah *hevin* (understood) why he faced such a hardship.

Even after understanding why this hardship was imposed on him, Noah wondered how he could rectify his mistake and ease his pain. This is where our case against Noah is centered, for it is clear that his only true solution was to once again occupy himself with Torah and matters of sanctity. I myself have met numerous people who have miraculously gotten

back on their feet after accepting the yoke of Torah.

For example, it is said that the Maharsha would attach some of his hair (which was long) to the ceiling of his study chamber in order not to fall asleep while learning Torah. Furthermore, certain Torah giants would study Torah while immersing their feet in ice-cold water, for they knew that the real solution to all their problems and every ill was complete self-sacrifice in learning Torah. Most notably, it is said that: "Moonlight [i.e., nighttime] was created only to facilitate learning" (Eruvin 65a), as well as: "You shall speak of them [words of Torah] ... when you lie down and when you arise" (Devarim 6:7).

Yet instead of occupying himself with learning Torah and observing mitzvot upon leaving the Ark, Noah chose to plant a vineyard, drink its wine, and become drunk. In doing so, he tried to ease the pain that he experienced during the flood. As a result, he spiritually digressed and is described as "Noah, man of the earth" (Bereshith 9:20), instead of "a righteous man, perfect" as he is initially described (ibid. 6:9). Hence the Torah introduced his deed (planting a vineyard) through the term *vayachel* ("and he began"), which is related to *chullin*, a profane act. Instead of solving his problem through Torah and holiness, he chose profane deeds and drunkenness.

In fact the prefix *va* in the term *vayachel* indicates trouble, for the Satan entices in order to accuse later on.

Very Bad Advice

According to what we have said, we may explain the exchange that occurred between Noah and the Satan, which is related in Yalkut Shimoni: "He planted a vineyard. The Satan came and said to him: 'Would you like us to plant it together, you and I?' Noah agreed. The Satan then brought a lamb and slaughtered it over the vine. Then he brought a lion and slaughtered it over it. Then he brought a monkey and slaughtered it over it. Then he brought a pig and slaughtered it over it. Then he watered the vine with their blood. Hence he hinted to Noah: When a person drinks one cup, he is like a lamb, modest and meek. When he drinks two cups, he becomes mighty as a lion and begins to speak with pride.... When he becomes drunk, he becomes a pig, dirtied by mud and wallowing in filth."

Several questions surround this midrash. First, have we ever heard of the Satan approaching a person with advice, as appears to be the case here with Noah? Furthermore, how could Noah have agreed to the Satan's participation? Finally, why did Noah not prevent the Satan from slaughtering these animals over the vine? In reality, the Satan is extremely crafty, constantly attempting to entice us in this world and make us transgress G-d's commands. Yet in the World to Come, he reveals his true nature to those



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who study Torah. In fact it was the Satan who taught the secrets of the incense to Moshe Rabbeinu, for the incense (which is a special blend of spices) encompasses numerous combinations of names as well as many secrets of Torah and kabbalah. It is the Satan himself who accuses us and brings us to justice, saying: “Why have you listened to me and gone out to sin instead of studying Torah?” Very often, the Satan infiltrates our minds, to the point that our very own decisions are nothing other than his advice. As we have explained, Noah was looking for a way to alleviate

the suffering that he endured while on the Ark, and his mind was filled with thoughts from the Satan, thoughts that enticed him to seek out wine. That is why he immediately descended to the level of “man of the earth,” for at that point the Satan had already joined him in thought and deed. The Satan was already involved in Noah’s decision to plant a vineyard, and he lowered him a little more with each step.

That is why the accusation against Noah is so grave.

Around the Parsha

A Rainbow in the Clouds

Once Noah left the Ark, G-d promised to never bring a flood upon the earth that would destroy all flesh, and He even provided Noah with a sign – the rainbow – as it is written: “I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall be, when I place a cloud over the earth and the bow will be seen in the cloud, I will remember My covenant between you and every living being among all flesh, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Bereshith 9:13-15).

In the Gemara, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi affirms that whoever sees a rainbow in a cloud must prostrate himself (according to Rashi, this is because it reflects the glory of G-d), as it is written: “Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day.... When I saw, I prostrated myself” (Ezekiel 1:28). However the Gemara goes on to say that in the land of Israel, “they cursed anyone who did this, for it seemed as if he was prostrating himself to the rainbow. Nevertheless, he certainly recites a blessing. Which blessing does he recite? ‘Blessed be He Who remembers the covenant.’ In a Beraita it was taught: Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka says, ‘He says [in reciting the blessing]: Who is faithful with His covenant and Who fulfills His word.’” (Berachot 59a). Hence Rav Papa concludes that we must recite both blessings: “Blessed be He Who remembers the covenant, Who is faithful with His covenant and Who fulfills His word.”

The Maharsha explains this blessing as follows: “Faithful with His covenant – this is the covenant that G-d made with Noah to never again bring a flood upon the world. Yet since there is nothing new under the sun, and since the rainbow existed from the time of Creation [on the eve of Shabbat, at dusk, along with nine other things], the blessing ends with Who fulfills His word. The concept of the rainbow was already conceived by His word during the six days of Creation, even if it appeared to people only now.”

Rabbi David Abudraham explains the blessing slightly differently: “Who remembers the covenant – when He sees the ungodly, He wants to destroy His world. Then He sees the rainbow, remembers the covenant by which He swore to never destroy the world by a flood, and He restrains Himself. G-d does not need reminders, since He never forgets. Yet by means of the rainbow, He is telling the world that the ungodly among Israel have become too numerous, and that without this oath, He would have destroyed it. Faithful with His covenant – He will not annul His covenant despite the ungodly. Who Fulfills His word – even if He had not made a covenant, His word would be fulfilled.”

Reversing the Formulation

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 229:1) tells us how to recite the blessing: “Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who remembers the covenant, Who is faithful with His covenant, and Who fulfills His word.” The author of Kneset Hagedolah points out that this formulation (which, incidentally, is brought by the Gemara) is the only acceptable one, and that those who reverse it are committing an error.

In his book Ben Ish Hai (First Year, Eikev), Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad cites the opinion of Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz in Yaarot Devash (1:12), namely that there is no reason to mention G-d’s Name in the blessing, since two types of rainbows exist: The regular rainbow that we are all familiarize with, and a techelet-colored rainbow, which alone is the sign of the covenant. The problem is that we do not know which is which! The Ben Ish Hai strongly opposes this view, however, underlining that an explanation derived from the Midrash cannot annul the Jewish custom to recite a blessing that contains G-d’s Name upon seeing a rainbow. This is all the more true, since the great poskim agree with the Shulchan Aruch. Nevertheless, anyone who prefers to recite the blessing without mentioning Hashem’s Name should think of it in heart, and he will not be held accountable.

The Chayei Adam states, “I found in a book, whose title I have forgotten, that we must not tell others of a rainbow, for ‘one who utters slander is a fool’ [Mishlei 10:18]” (Chayei Adam 63:4).

Some believe that, on the contrary, we should inform others of a rainbow’s appearance so they too can see it and be encouraged to do teshuvah. They will then thank Hashem for His kindnesses, for He remembers the covenant which He made with His creations and protects the world from another flood (Rabbi Moshe Levi in his book Birkat Hashem IV:4:35).

In his book Machzik Bracha, the Chida declares that we must recite the blessing even if we see a rainbow twice in less than 30 days.

The Mishnah Berurah adds that we may recite the blessing even several times a month, just as we recite the blessing upon hearing thunder.

The Mishnah in Chagigah affirms: “Whosoever takes no thought for the honor of his Maker, it would be better had he not come into the world.” The Gemara asks what this is referring to, and Rav Abba responds: “It refers to one who looks at the rainbow” (Chagigah 16a). In fact it is written, “Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brilliance all around. That was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem” (Ezekiel 1:28). The Mishnah continues by stating: “Anyone who looks at three things, his eyesight diminishes: At the rainbow, at the nassi, and at the kohen [performing the priestly blessing].”

The author of Iyun Yaakov notes that it is forbidden to “look at,” but not to “see.” This is permitted in any case, and it is even a mitzvah, as mentioned in regards to the nassi: “Your eyes shall behold your master” (Isaiah 30:20), and in regards to the rainbow that must be blessed. This is also the view of the Rosh in one of his halachic responses, as well as the view of the Magen Avraham.

The book Zechira states that it is dangerous to look at the rainbow too intensely. It also points out that a rainbow that appears with rain is an indication of mercy, whereas one that appears without rain is an indication of severity. Finally, if a rainbow appears in the morning, it is a message to the Jewish people, whereas if it appears in the evening, it is a message to the nations of the world.

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Filled with Robbery

Our Sages have taught, “Come and see how great is the power of robbery. Although the generation of the flood transgressed all laws, their decree of punishment was sealed only because they stretched out their hands to rob, as it is written: ‘For the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I will destroy them from the earth’ [Bereshith 6:13]” (Sanhedrin 108a).

The commentators have many things to say in regards to this subject. When the sages of Mussar examined the sin of robbery and its punishment, they were astonished: Why did the punishment of the generation of the flood, which was sealed because they committed themselves to robbery, take this form? That is, why were they punished by means of a flood, rather than by some other form of destruction?

The Kli Yakar explains it well:

“Since everything which is stolen enters into the robber’s domain, it is fitting to bring a flood upon him, for in a flood each drop touches another and enters into its domain. Thus we read in regards to rains of blessing: ‘Who fashioned a channel for the torrent of rain’ [Job 38:25], from which we may deduce that each drop has its own particular channel, thus preventing it from entering into the domain of another. Now if someone has committed robbery by entering someone else’s domain, it is fitting for rains of blessing to transform into torrents of rain for him, in which case all drops mix together.”

The great men of Israel have always been extremely meticulous in avoiding any possibility of robbery, and they have left us a faithful testimony of their deeds. We must emulate them and learn from their example, as Rabbi Alter Tuvia Wein Zatzal, a student of the Radin yeshiva, recounts:

“I remember something that happened around the years 5687-5689. The town of Radin [where the gaon Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen Kagan Zatzal, the Chafetz Chaim, lived] was in an uproar. Why? The townspeople learned that the Chafetz Chaim said that he must flee from Radin!

“Everyone wondered why he had to flee. It turned out that the Chafetz Chaim had learned that the individual who cleaned furnace stacks was charging people a half-zloty for a single cleaning, which in his opinion was an outlandish price.

“This was armed robbery! Theft! It was forbidden to live in such a place. All the pleading from the townspeople, and even from important figures outside of town, requesting that he change his mind, did nothing. As long as the Chafetz Chaim saw something that bordered on robbery, he believed that it was forbidden to live in such a town.”

Running After a Hen

The following story is told regarding the gaon of Jerusalem, Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Etz Chaim:

As everyone knows, Rabbi Isser Zalman would immerse himself in the study of Torah with tremendous intensity, to the point that when he was walking outside, he failed to notice obstacles in his path, and more than once he tripped over them.

One day, he was so immersed in the study of Torah that he mistakenly entered a courtyard in Jerusalem. When he opened the gate to the courtyard, a hen escaped and began running in the street. One has never seen true fear of sin unless he witnessed Rabbi Isser Zalman using all his Torah knowledge to run after the hen in a desperate effort to catch it! The gaon, who feared that his entry into the courtyard had caused the hen to flee, realized that he was responsible for returning it in good condition. Hence taking no account of his honor or his health, he ran after the hen in order to retrieve it.

In another story concerning Rabbi Isser Zalman, one also connected to the depth of his Torah learning, it is said that he once entered a lime pit and stained his clothes with white powdery lime. What would anyone else have done in a similar situation? He would have immediately shaken off the powder from his clothes. However that wasn’t what Rabbi Isser Zalman did.

His thoughts were not occupied with such worries. Instead, he did not move from the spot until the owner of the lime pit arrived, at which point Rabbi Isser Zalman asked the owner to forgive him for the lime that had clung to his clothes, which may have been construed as robbery.

Such conduct is based on a true fear of G-d, like “a cemented cistern that does not lose a drop” (Pirkei Avoth 2:9). This represents the lofty level of a Jew who sanctifies himself through the holiness of Torah, and whose every action is connected to halachic details that teach us a fine lesson in respecting the possessions of others, as well as the fact that in regards to robbery, a small sum is just as significant as a large one. – Tuvcha Yabiu

Robbing the Community

What follows is another Mussar view on the concept of robbery, and the way that Torah scholars understand it.

One day, the Chazon Ish traveled to Tel-Aviv to attend the wedding of a relative. At the end of the ceremony, he was forced to wait for a car that would return him to Bnei Brak. In the meantime, he found himself standing on the sidewalk outside the wedding hall.

Someone offered to bring him a chair so he could sit down until his lift arrived. Yet to his great astonishment, the Chazon Ish refused, explaining that if he sat down, anyone walking by would have to go around him on the sidewalk, which would constitute robbing from the community!

Men of Faith

Tremendous Merit

Shabbat was extremely important to Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, more than any other day of the week. His students recount that on Shabbat he felt a great spiritual elevation, and a spirit of poetry and hymns rested upon him.

At each Shabbat meal, he would usually sing zemirot with a pleasant voice, for Rabbi Haim was known for his singing, and his fine voice carried a long way. (Note: Many of Rabbi Haim’s piyutim appear in the book Roni VeSimchi, and as we know he left entire sacks filled with his writings, songs and poems included, many of which were lost when thieves came to Mogador and stole his precious treasure trove of poems, much to our loss.)

Our saintly forefathers tell us that on one Shabbat, Rabbi Haim was singing with his beautiful voice, as he usually did, piyutim from the poet and Kabbalist Rabbi Israel Nadjara Zatzal.

In fact he was singing with such emotion that Rabbi Israel Nadjara personally revealed himself to Rabbi Haim while he was awake, held him in his arms, and embraced him for the heartfelt emotion and beautiful voice with which he sang his piyutim.

Guard Your Tongue

Even Without Specifics

Even if a person is making disparaging remarks about an individual without revealing his name, talking without a specific goal in mind, if the listener can determine which individual that person is talking about, it is forbidden. – Chafetz Chaim

Reflections

It is written, “These are the offspring [toldot] of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations” (Bereshith 6:9).

To explain this verse, Rabbeinu Yosef Haim of Baghdad cites a verse from Scripture: “As water reflects a face back to a face, so one’s heart is reflected back to him by another” (Mishlei 27:19). The relationship that others develop with us reflects how we are actually behaving with them.

Hence in the same way that a person’s image is accurately reflected in water, likewise a person’s behavior is reflected in the relationship that his friends develop with him.

This is the meaning of the expression, “These are the offspring of Noah.” Here the Torah is teaching us by allusion that if a person is pleasant (noach) with others, his actions being governed by peace and harmony – his way of speaking, his behavior, and his mannerisms being infused with goodness – then the consequences (toldot) of these actions will also be pleasant (noach), since his friends and those he interacts with will also be pleasant (noach) with him. The Rav points out that the name Noach (“Noah”) is composed of the same letters as chen, which means “favor.” By acting in this way, you will find favor in the eyes of all who see you.

Leaving Nothing Uneaten

It is written, “Take for yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to yourself, that it shall be as food for you and for them” (Bereshith 6:21).

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman tried to explain the apparent redundancy of the expression “every food that is eaten.” He notes that the Midrash recounts that before the flood, people had a more robust constitution and were naturally stronger than the generations which followed.

In fact they planted crops once every 40 years, for the period that we enjoy between Pesach and Shavuot lasted the entire year for them, and a one-day old child was stronger than a demon. Finally, there is no doubt that fruits tasted better and were more fragrant at that time.

In order for Noah not to be tempted to save these fruits for after the flood, G-d warned him by commanding him to take only “every food that is eaten.” Then, in order to discourage him from “saving” his food in the Ark for afterwards, the verse adds: “it shall be as food for you and for them.” That is, he was warned not to leave anything uneaten, for both he and those with him were to eat everything they had gathered.

Why He Studied Torah

It is written, “Of every clean animal, take for yourself seven pairs, a male with its mate” (Bereshith 7:2).

Rashi explains: “Of every clean animal – that are destined to be clean for Israel. We learn [from here] that Noah studied Torah.”

The Levush asks how Noah could have studied Torah, since the Gemara (Sanhedrin 59a) states that a heathen who studies Torah is liable to death.

He provides a fine response in the book Pardes Yosef, basing himself on a story related in tractate Shabbat:

A heathen went to see Shammai and said, “Convert me, but on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.” Shammai’s response was to send him away. The heathen then went to see Hillel, who converted him.

Hillel said to him: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah.”

The Maharsha is surprised that Hillel taught this man the entire Torah before having converted him. He explains that it was permitted because the heathen had come to study Torah with the intention of converting.

Not so for Noah. He studied mainly to learn how to distinguish between animals that were clean and animals that were not, so that afterwards he could determine which kinds he could bring as an offering to Hashem.

This is why Rashi wrote, “Of every clean animal – that are destined to be clean for Israel. We learn [from here] that Noah studied Torah.”

Corrupting the Earth

It is written, “G-d saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt” (Bereshith 6:12).

Rabbi Chiya said, “See that when the sons of men are righteous and observe the mitzvot of the Torah, the earth becomes invigorated and a fullness of joy pervades it....

“Yet when men corrupt their way and fail to observe the mitzvot of the Torah, and they sin before their Master, they thrust, as it were, the Shechinah out of the world, and the earth is thus left in a corrupt state.

“With the Shechinah being thrust out, another spirit comes and hovers over the world, bringing with it corruption. It is in this sense that we say that Israel ‘gives strength unto G-d.’ ”

– Zohar I:61a

In the Light of the Parsha

The Shame of the Generation Revealed

It is written, “Hashem said: ‘Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do!’ ” (Bereshith 11:6).

In regards to verse 9 (“and from there Hashem scattered them”), Rashi asks: “Now which [sins] were worse, those of the generation of the flood, or those of the generation of the dispersion?”

“The former did not stretch forth their hands against G-d, whereas the latter did stretch forth their hands against G-d, to wage war against Him. Nevertheless, the former were drowned, while the latter did not perish from the world. This is because the generation of the flood were thieves and there was strife among them, and so they were destroyed. Yet [the latter] behaved with mutual love and friendship.”

In reality, the generation of the dispersion did not exhibit genuine mutual love and friendship. They just knew that the generation of the flood had been wiped out because of strife, and therefore they united so as not to provoke G-d’s wrath against them.

“Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do” – strengthened by their unity, they did not fear G-d, but instead they confronted Him by building a tower.

Now Hashem, Who probes the heart and mind, knew that their love for one another wasn’t genuine. In order to reveal this to the entire world, He confused their language. This led them to dissension and murder, revealing their vileness and the depth of their depravity to everyone.

The punishment which they received was therefore in accordance with their deeds: G-d scattered them over the face of the earth by truly separating them from one another.

