

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

STRICTLY FOR THE BIRDS

“From each bird according to its kind, and from each animal according to its kind...” (6:2)

Recent world events have shown that anti-Semitism is alive and well and living in all those centers of civilization in which it was considered extinct half a century ago.

The existence of a Jewish state, the 19th century Jewish intelligentsia’s ultimate panacea against anti-Semitism, has failed to prevent the emergence of an anti-Semitism as potentially virulent as any strain to date – with the ultimate irony that we are now dubbed the new “Nazis”!

What is all this supposed to teach us?

The existence of the Jewish People is an other-worldly phenomenon. The “unhistory” of the Jewish People has perplexed historians and left them either wanting to change their professions or fudging the facts.

Logically, they say, we shouldn’t be here at all. And in a sense, they’re right. We don’t belong here. We occupy this world as a piece of rented real estate. This is not our place. We are an other-worldly people.

The Jewish People is likened to a bird. In its natural element, the bird can soar to the heights, leaving its earth-bound cousins far below. However, when you enclose a bird in a cage, not only does it no longer soar, but its very

advantages become its weaknesses. Its feet are not suited to walking around. Its wings atrophy. Its plumage wilts.

In this week’s Torah portion, when the animals entered the ark, the Torah lists the birds before the land animals: *“From each bird according to its kind, and from each animal according to its kind....”* However, after the entry to the ark it mentions the land animals before the birds: *“And the animal that is not kosher, or the birds....”* And when about

to leave the ark, the order reverts to the birds being mentioned before the land animals: *“Every living thing that is with you of all flesh, of birds, of animals....”*

Why did the Torah change the order?

The ark was a microcosm of the world. Just as the world has three levels of holiness, so too the ark had three levels. Just as the world has a sun that radiates light to it, so too the ark had a precious jewel fixed in the ceiling that radiated light to it.

Outside the ark, the birds can fly. They are pre-eminent. However, when they are

cooped up in an ark, they become the least of the animals.

We are a nation that has been designed to soar to the skies, but if we choose to lock ourselves into an ark of physicality we will find ourselves as sprightly as a Dodo.

“We are a nation that has been designed to soar to the skies...”

Sources:

Midrash, Maharal, Table Talk, Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter, Ariel Hershkowitz

It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and G-d resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants except for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to repopulate the earth. G-d instructs Noach to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noach sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. G-d tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to G-d from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. G-d vows never again to flood the entire world and designates

the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. G-d commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibitions against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world's climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach's sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach's three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in G-d fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

YONATAN – THE IDEAL FRIEND

When our Talmudic Sages wished to cite an example of the ideal friendship - one that is not motivated by any ulterior motive - they mentioned the relationship between David and Yonatan. Yonatan,

who was in line to inherit the throne from his father King Saul, was



aware that by protecting David from his father's wrath he was forfeiting his inheritance by championing David as his father's successor. He nevertheless risked his life and sacrificed his future to assist David.

In his eulogy on Yonatan who was slain in a battle with the Philistines, David bemoaned the passing of "my brother.. whose love to me was more wonderful than the love for women."

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WHEN MAJORITY DOES NOT RULE

One of the most dramatic moments in Jewish history took place during the siege of Yerushalayim by the mighty Assyrian army led by Sancherib. After conquering almost the entire known world this superpower captured the Kingdom of Yisrael and exiled the ten tribes to some unknown destination in Africa. All that stood in the way of universal mastery was the Kingdom of Yehuda, whose righteous king, Chizkiyahu, refused to surrender and take his people into exile.

Yerushalayim, the capital of this kingdom, was split between the followers of the king and the followers of Shavno, the officer in charge of the royal household, who advocated coming to terms with Sancherib. When Chizkiyahu realized that his opponents outnumbered his followers he began to fear that the judicial principle of “majority rule” applied to this situation, and that Hashem would side with his opposition. The head of this opposition had already shot an arrow beyond the city walls carrying a note to the enemy that his party was ready to surrender but that Chizkiyahu was stubbornly resisting.

At this critical moment the Prophet Yeshayahu came to the king with a message from Hashem: “Say not it is a bond that all of which these people wish to call a bond.” (*Yeshayahu 8:12*). This means, says the *gemara*, that there is no need to follow the majority when it is composed of wicked people who are prepared to come to terms with an enemy who brazenly blasphemed Hashem and who was intent on destroying the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Even before a Heavenly angel wiped out the Assyrian army in one night the wicked man who wished to surrender to it received his just deserts. He sought to shame his master and in return the honor he sought as peacemaker turned into shame. He triumphantly marched at the head of his followers as they went to meet the Assyrians. But as soon as he was outside, the Angel Gavriel shut the city gate behind him, trapping all of his followers within the walls. When the Assyrians asked him where all of his followers were, he, unaware of the Heavenly intervention, could only meekly admit that they deserted him. The enraged enemy accused him of mocking them and executed him in a cruel and shameful manner.

• *Sanhedrin 26a*

DIGNITY OR DEATH

Since the testimony of witnesses was so crucial to deciding a lawsuit the judges made an intense effort to test their credibility. Each witness was questioned separately to ascertain that his testimony did not conflict with those of the others. But even before that the judges gave the witnesses a stern lecture about the serious consequences of bearing false witness.

Both Rabbi Yehuda and Rava suggest that the sermon given to the witnesses was based on passages in *Mishlei* (25). Rabbi Yehuda refers to 25:14 which warns that as a result of false testimony rain is withheld from the world and famine comes. This is dismissed by Rava as inadequate because the false witnesses can comfort themselves with the thought that famine threatens the farmer but not the artisan. He suggests instead 25:18 which contains the threat of plague as a consequence of false testimony.

This is also dismissed by Rabbi Ashi because the false witness can always delude himself into believing that he will not be a victim of the plague. He quotes instead the Sage Nosson bar Mar Zutra who states that we warn the witnesses whom we suspect of being hired to testify falsely that they will lose the respect of those who hired them.

The source for this is the incident described in *Melachim I 21*. The wicked King Achav was anxious to acquire the vineyard of Novos the Yisreelite which bordered his palace. When Novos stubbornly refused every offer for selling it, Achav followed the advice of his wicked wife Izevel. He hired witnesses to testify that Novos was guilty of the capital crime of blaspheming against Hashem and the king so that he could have him executed and confiscate his property. When she mentioned the candidates for the role of witnesses she herself referred to them as “wicked people”.

The last suggestion, which is the *gemara*’s conclusion, shows that the threat to a person’s dignity is a more effective warning than the possibility of a threat to his life.

• *Sanhedrin 29a*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “Hashem is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Metushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it!” Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven *amot*.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it's better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach's disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Ham's fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

O WHAT A GOOD JEW AM I

D. in Chevy Chase, MD wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Am I am a bad Jew if I eat bacon, don't go to temple very often, actually only on the major holidays? I do celebrate Passover, and do try to keep it. Religion just isn't a very big part of my American Jewish life. Let me know, thanks!*

Dear D.,

I don't know.

I happened to go to a lecture on parenting recently given by Rabbi Noach Orlowek. An insight he gave relates to your question:

He spoke about teenagers. Teenage starts at 13 and ends at 20. The significance of these ages is that 13 is when a boy (or a girl at 12) becomes liable in the Earthly court for transgressing *mitzvot* (commandments), and 20 is when he becomes liable in the Heavenly court. Why is the Heavenly court more lenient (i.e., judges at a later date)? Because the Heavenly court judges a person as a whole, and until 20 the

person has not yet finished developing his personality. Here on earth, on the other hand, we can't judge people, we can only judge actions. As a teenager grows we can judge his actions, but not the person.

So, the question of whether you are "good" or "bad" is for G-d to decide. We can only speak about what you do, not who you are.

I heard a story from Rabbi Nachman Bulman, *zatzal*, who heard it from a firsthand source. In Poland in the early 20th century, a few Jewish students were allowed to attend the Polish medical schools. The only catch was that they had to supply their own Jewish cadavers to study on. After all, it would not befit a Polish cadaver to help a Jewish student. So, the students approached the foremost Halachic authority of the time, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. They proposed, that in order to keep the Jewish presence in the medical schools, that they be allowed to use the bodies of deceased Jews of ill repute and other like types, people who had been lured away from Judaism into Poland's criminal street element. The Rabbi, after recovering from the shock of the suggestion, responded, "For me to allow that I would have to know what G-d thinks about those people. And that I can never know."

Your *actions* leave room for improvement. So go ahead. Start to improve!

ISRAEL Forever

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

FACING THE FLOOD

After two years of intifada and the worst sort of suicidal terrorism it should be abundantly clear to Arafat and his henchmen that Israel will not surrender to his political blackmail and that it is only a matter of time until their irrelevance turns into extinction. Nevertheless, these terrorists boldly continue to masquerade before the world as leaders of a state about to be born, completely oblivious of their inevitable descent into the dustbin of history.

Iraq knows that President Bush means business and that it is only a matter of time until Saddam Hussein joins all the vicious dictators of history in the perdition reserved for such villains. Nevertheless, the loser of the last "mother of all wars" vaingloriously struts in defiance of the international community, boasting that his country can take on the Americans and anyone who joins them.

If you are wondering how it is possible for someone starting disaster in the face to go on with his corrupt business as usual just take a look at what Rashi quotes from the Talmudic Sages in his commentary on the chapter of the Torah which will be read publicly in synagogues this Shabbat. Noach was instructed to build for 120 years an ark which would shelter him and his family from the Deluge waters

divinely decreed as the instrument for destroying a corrupt world. G-d could have saved this one righteous man in many different and less complex ways. He insisted on the building of the ark so that Noach's neighbors would inquire as to why he was involved in such unusual construction. For 120 years he repeatedly warned them that unless they repented their ways they would be destroyed by a flood. Their only reaction was to threaten Noach that should such a catastrophe occur they would physically prevent him from escaping it!

This is the historical pattern of corruption. The Third Reich which was supposed to last a thousand years is in the dustbin of history. Hitler refused to learn from what had happened to the Roman Empire before him and all the other empires who made a great deal of "sound and fury" on the world stage before becoming only memories. It seems to be an innate part of the character of corrupt tyrants to ignore their obvious fate and to continue wishfully pursuing their course.

The Deluge, of course, did come in the end and so, too, will come the end of all the pompous evildoers – no matter how long it takes – while Israel will go on forever.