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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Preservation or Transformation?

“...Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations... (6:9)

Parshat Noach opens in a world unraveling at the seams: “*And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence*” (Bereishit 6:11). In this collapsing moral landscape, one figure stands alone: “*Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with God.*”

But what does it mean to be “righteous in his generations”? Rashi famously brings two opinions: One, that Noach was truly righteous—even more so had he lived in the time of Avraham; the other, that his righteousness was relative only to his generation, a pale shadow next to what could have been.

These two views stem not from differing historical assessments, but from two paradigms of spiritual growth. Noach is *tamim*, wholesome. He walks *with* God. But Avraham walks *before* God (Bereishit 17:1)—Avraham is a trailblazer, a force that reshapes history. Noach preserves. Avraham transforms.

And yet, Noach’s preservation is not passivity. Noach took refuge in the Ark – the *teivah*. In the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching, *teivah* also means “word.” The Ark is not only a physical refuge but a spiritual one: a world constructed of holy speech, of prayer and Torah. When chaos reigns outside, a Jew builds a sanctuary of meaning through these tools.

Noach’s greatness lies in his ability to build this *teivah*—to shape a world insulated from a flood not only of water, but of cynicism, violence, and nihilism. He may not change the world outside, but he ensures that inside, truth survives.

The Maharal notes that Noach is told *bo el hateivah*—“come into the ark.” Not *lech*, go, but *bo*, come. God is already there. The floodwaters, in their destructive fury, are also agents of divine renewal. The *teivah* becomes a womb—a place not of exile, but gestation. Inside, the seeds of a new world are nurtured.

This is the blueprint for Jewish survival. In every generation, there are floods—cultural, spiritual, physical—that threaten to erase identity. The response is not escape, but construction. One builds a *teivah* from words: the words of Torah, the words of tefillah, the sanctified words exchanged in a Jewish home.

The root of Noach's name is *noach*—rest, serenity. He embodies the tranquil soul untouched by chaos. He is the silent tzaddik. Avraham goes outward; Noach goes inward. The Torah gives space for both paths.

But perhaps the tragedy is that Noach, for all his righteousness, does not pray for his generation. He builds, but he does not bridge. Avraham pleads for Sodom. Noach, silent, survives—but alone.

Thus, Parshat Noach is a mirror: Will we be Noach, building arks of personal holiness, safe but isolated? Or will we also be Avraham, transforming the flood into a path toward redemption?

In a world still turbulent, the *teivah* remains a call—to speak, to sanctify, to build. But also to open its doors.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants except for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the world. Hashem instructs Noach to build an ark in which to escape the flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, including the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, this ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends forth 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 seven more days, Noach once again sends forth the dove, which this time does not return. Hashem tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant.

Noach and his descendants are now permitted to eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibitions against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder and eating the meat of a living 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 Yefet, 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 Hashem fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy from Noach to Avram.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 27)

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”

Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

Kriat Shema al Hamitah concludes with the poetic Tefillah “*Adon Olam*”: **Master of the universe, Who reigned before any form was created; at the time when His Will brought all into being, then His Name was proclaimed as King. After all has ceased to be, He, the Awesome One, will reign alone. It is He Who was, He Who is, and He Who shall remain in splendor. He is One, there is no second to compare to Him, to declare as His equal. Without beginning, and with no end, He is the power and dominion. He is my God, my living Redeemer, Rock of my pain in time of distress. He is my Banner, and Refuge for me, the portion in my cup on the day that I call. Into Your Hand I shall entrust my spirit when I go to sleep, and I shall awaken. With my spirit shall my body remain, Hashem is with me I shall not fear.**

“*Adon Olam*” is one of the most famous liturgical poems in the Jewish world. Fascinatingly enough, despite its almost universal recognition and enormous popularity, no one knows for sure who actually composed it. Many attribute “*Adon Olam*” to Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol (1021-1058), the renowned Spanish philosopher and poet. Others attribute it to Rabbi Chai Gaon (939-1038), the head of the legendary Yeshivah in the ancient city of Pumbedita (located in modern-day Iraq). Some even suggest that it might have been composed by the first century luminary Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. In all events, despite the mystery surrounding its composer, it has been a part of the Shabbat morning services for hundreds of years and many communities also have the custom to sing it at the conclusion of the nighttime services on Yom Tov as well.

There is so much that can be written about this beautiful and sublime Tefillah. However, with your permission, I would like to focus primarily on the reason that it is included as a part of Kriat Shema al Hamitah.

The final two verses read, “Into Your Hand I shall entrust my spirit when I go to sleep, and I shall awaken. With my spirit shall my body remain, Hashem is with me I shall not fear.”

“*Adon Olam*” is split into two sections. The first part focuses on the fact that Hashem is Eternal and Inestimable. Whereas the second part concentrates on our being able to build an intensely personal and intimate relationship with Him. It is the most astonishing concept! That Hashem, the Master of the entire universe, the Controller and the Sustainer of every single detail in His creation, is my personal God. That He cares for “little, insignificant” me. Because in His Eyes I am anything but irrelevant. What could possibly be more inspirational than ending the day contemplating both Hashem’s Omnipotence and His perpetual accessibility!

Rabbi Nachum Levi of Brisk, an ardent Chassid of Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin, recounted that during a business trip to Leipzig, he stayed in an inn together with a local Jew who had come for business reasons to the famous Leipzig fair. Rabbi Levi was captivated by the refined conduct of his new acquaintance. Something, however, puzzled him greatly: His new-found friend’s particular profession left him vulnerable, by his own admission, to many spiritual pitfalls and, yet, the intensity of his *Avodat Hashem* was remarkable and inspiring. Some time later, Rabbi Levi found the correct moment to ask him: What was the secret to his spiritual success?

The German Jew told him, “Every night I recite Kriat Shema al Hamitah, and when I get to the words ‘*b’Yadcha afkid ruchi* – in Your Hand I shall entrust my spirit,’ I invest a lot of energy internalizing that these are not mere words. *That, each night, I am actually entrusting my soul to Hashem!* And I beg Him, ‘If You know that tomorrow I will be better, then please return my soul to me in the morning. But if, *chas v’shalom*, You know otherwise, please do not give me back my soul.”

That is why we bring our day to a close by defining our aspirations for the coming day! That tomorrow we should merit to sanctify Hashem’s Name and, by doing so, reveal another layer of Hashem’s Majesty in His world.

Or, as Rabbi Elazar Azkari (1533-1600) in his brilliant work *Sefer Charedim* on the Mitzvot (*Mitzvat Lo Ta’aseh* chapter 7) hauntingly expresses, “*B’toch libi Mishkan evneh* – In my heart I will build a tabernacle. *Korban akriv lo nafshi hayechidah* – I will bring Him [Hashem] my only soul as a sacrifice.”

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

Procreation

(*Mitzvah 1 in Sefer HaChinuch*)

Hashem's first words to mankind were "*P'ru u'rvu u'milu es ha'aretz* — Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth" (*Bereishis* 1:28). These were also the first words that Hashem said to Noach and his sons when they emerged from the Ark (*ibid.* 9:1). As the first Mitzvah in the Torah, it is of primary importance. Therefore, when a person dies and ascends to Heaven, he is asked whether he was "involved" in this Mitzvah, either by bearing children or by helping others get married so that they may bear children (*Shabbos* 31a and *Maharsha*).

The basic Mitzvah entails bearing one son and one daughter, but it is also a Mitzvah to multiply as much as possible (see *Even HaEzer* §1). Noting that the word *u'rvu* (multiply) can also mean to raise children, *Rav Hirsch* suggests that this Mitzvah includes raising children and teaching them proper conduct.

The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of being fruitful and multiplying; so, too, the Final Redemption will come about only when the Jewish people are fruitful, multiply and fill the world (*Tanna Dvei Eliyahu Zuta* ch. 14).

The commentaries offer several reasons for this Mitzvah:

1. Since man does not live forever, his service of Hashem includes leaving behind another generation that will continue that service (*Rav Menachem HaBavli*). This is why the Mitzvah requires a husband and wife to bear a son and a daughter, who can replace them.
2. The requirement to provide a "replacement" for when we leave the world reminds us of our mortality and humbles us before our eternal Creator (see *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* ch. 12).
3. Hashem commanded mankind to multiply so that the world would be settled, populated, and could thereby fulfill its purpose (*Sefer HaChinuch*).
4. "A king's glory is apparent through multitudes of subjects" (*Mishlei* 14:28). The more children a person bears, the more he increases Hashem's glory, which is the purpose of Creation (*Yalkut HaMachiri*, *ibid.*). Furthermore, since man was created in Hashem's image, procreation increases Hashem's image (*Yevamos* 63b).
5. Mashiach will not arrive until all the souls come down from Heaven (*Yevamos* 62a). This is because each soul accomplishes another part of mankind's mission.
6. We connect with Hashem by emulating His ways, such as by performing acts of kindness and compassion (*Rashi* to *Devarim* 13:5). Since He creates and nurtures countless living beings, He commanded us to emulate Him by bearing and raising children.

Q & A - NOACH

Questions

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?

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Answers

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 its 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 Cham. And because Cham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Cham'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.