

Parshas Noach

This week's Parsha- Noach, the second Parsha in Chumash Bereishis, has a theme centered around the flood. The recounting of the historical narrative and the details, as well as the generations born from Noach until Avraham, follow the theme of the first Rashi- that the whole purpose of beginning the Torah with creation closely is to show that Hashem created the world. In that world, He decides who goes where, especially regarding the inheritance of the land of Israel.

The reason the flood occurred was a decision by Hashem to "reset" the world and start over, so to speak, given that the first ten generations from Adam devolved into moral depravity. Ultimately, even if we are to hold Noach accountable for not trying to change the world, we know the flood occurred, and there was a reset. The specifics for using water and rain for 40 days models that this mode of resetting is representative of a Mikva, which uses full submersion to cleanse a person- in a bath that is at a minimum 40 seah (volume measurement).

Holding Noach accountable for not doing more to convert his neighbours (which is why the water is called Mei Noach- "waters of Noach") is a post hoc explanation, but truthfully, it would seem Hashem had to reset the world. At creation, humans were given the power to reason, create, destroy, communicate and live with one another. The world had a basic moral code imbued in Adam that, when left so to speak to the hands of humans, quickly devolved into moral

depravity. Humans are theoretically held to a higher standard than any other animal (although all animals aside from the ones Noach saved) because we presumably can devise and live by a code that knows right from wrong. This is also our Achilles heel; we can use logic and reason and learn to convince ourselves of any outcome we want (think in modern times, revisionist history is acceptable even though there ought to be a clear right and wrong). Why was the society at Noach's time so bad that there needed to be a reset? Without the direct involvement of Hashem, who imbued a deep code within the world that objectively delineates right from wrong, humans would have imploded. What is right and wrong objectively, if not tied to a moral standard "greater than us"? We see this is true because, after the flood, Hashem commanded Noach on their ability to eat animals (unlike Adam, who only ate greens because, at his time, there was no right, so to speak, to kill an animal for food.) Once Hashem said that it was permitted, then we had the rules by which we needed to live.

In some ways, the flood was a revelation to the world, for the world received the seven Noahide laws. Humanity was given a moral code based on a direct divine intervention that had only previously been imbued in the psyche of Adam and, therefore, got destroyed as the generations deviated from the "code" for which they had no reason to uphold. Now that it was codified, it became immovable, and therefore, society globally can now know right from wrong inexplicably and undeniably- and all deviations from there (usually based on some higher reasoning that all sounds

good) end up with the devolution or destruction or unsustainability of that society.

Rashi mentioned two explanations as to whether Noach was righteous only in his generation or righteous altogether- even if he was in Avraham's generation. In a second Rashi- later in the Parsha when Hashem said to Noach that he was chosen because he was righteous, Rashi seems to support the notion that Noach was eternally righteous, meaning had he even been in other generations, he would have been considered good. Because he explains that Hashem was complimenting Noach and had Rashi posited according to the detriment- the explanation may have been different, mentioning that the praise only applies at that moment (see Rashi on 6:9 on the first time Noach is called Tzadik, and on 7:1) In chapter 9- following on the previous mentions about multiplying and being fruitful- humans-through Noach was given dominion over the animal kingdom- but then the rules were put in place. This precursor of the divine moral code gestated and maintained until the birth of Avraham (our named forefather), who ultimately birthed the nation that is ours and to which Hashem gave the complete Torah and all its edicts to learn and live, which eventually brings Mashiach.

Since water is compared to the Torah, the flood was a level of Torah right for the time, strictly because Hashem gave it. This makes it the higher moral standard that Jews and non-Jews alike uphold (a reason the Rebbe was so pro-teaching the 7 Noahide laws—teaching the world those laws further prepares the world to accept Mashiach). All of history for Jews

and non-Jews is how far the world deviates morally from Hashem's word.

Therefore, when Cham sinned with his father after the flood, the mistake was far more cardinal- because it was like the golden calf right after receiving the Ten Commandments. You just were told what you could not do, and you did it.

The reason we don't consider Adam or Noach as our forefathers is that they are the forefathers of the rest of the world, who birthed all the other nations and chose later not to accept the Torah. Their moral compass waxes and wanes differently than that granted to our nation- the Jews who were given the Torah at Har Sinai.

Notwithstanding, Noach is still one of our early ancestors; as Chassidus explains, the Teiva-an ark is a protection against the chaotic 'waters' of the rest of the world. Our Teiva is Torah, like Noach's physical Teiva protected him and his family.

In conclusion, this Parsha points to the vital element that makes us Jews successful. The fact that we were given a moral code and laws with the Torah began when the Seven Noahide laws were granted. Following the ethical code, and for us, the Torah, is all part of the Teiva. We have to navigate the chaos around us, ultimately leading to the revelation and redemption with Mashiach.

Good Shabbos.