

Parshas Noach

This week's Parsha is Noach, named for the central character in the Parsha, who was saved from the Great Flood by building and living in the Ark, as Hashem had commanded him. This resulted in his family and many species being saved from destruction.

According to Rashi, Perek 7, Posuk 2, Noach learned the whole Torah. Rashi's reasoning is based on the Gemara in Sanhedrin (108b) and Zevachim (116a) about the animal selection process. Although it would seem, according to the opinions there, that the Teivah itself helped with selection. The animals on their own entered, Rashi derives based on the Pesukim, that Noach as well, knew the "pure animals" which would have only been known based on the Torah (i.e. it is only through Torah we understand what a "pure vs impure" animal is for Halachic reasons). There is another proof that Noach knew the Torah, based on Rashi 6:14 on "make for yourself an ark..." Rashi explains that Hashem could have punished the people around him in many ways, but why require Noach to embark on a 120-year project? The answer is so that people will inquire about what he is building, and Noach would answer that

Hashem will bring a flood on the world, so that maybe they will repent. This follows the Rambam's explanation in Mishnah Torah Hilchos Avoda Zara Ch 4, which discusses an Ir Hanidachas (a wayward city, whose inhabitants and residences are destined to be destroyed by the courts). The first steps to establishing this city in this manner require a sage to investigate whether the entire city is wayward, and then to issue a warning to see if the city will repent. Therefore, Noach, who is called Tzadik and Tamim (6:9), was the sage who a) established that the people were wayward, b) that he should warn them to try and repent¹. So, at the beginning of the Parsha, when Rashi explains why Noach had to be called righteous, and whether in comparison to Avraham or another generation, he would be considered a Tzadik or not, it was necessary to mention it, to confirm Noach's status as the appointee to warn the neighbors about their impending doom. This ties nicely in with the later question of why Noach needed to be ushered into the Teiva. Although Rashi 7:7 explains that Noach wavered in faith until the waters came. According to what I wrote above, he may have thought that the waters coming would prompt the people to finally turn around and repent², which would mean

¹ Mesushelach was around at the time, and without Rashi, we could question why he wasn't saved. Rashi explains that he had passed away just before the Mabul, and that is why, in 6:4, there were "another 7 days," which were for days of mourning the passing of Mesushelach. Further,

Mesushelach could be the second sage required by Halacha to warn the people, as explained by Rambam.

² Obviously, no one repented, and no one tried to build their own boat, which would have meant they also believed in Hashem.

they could be saved. So, Hashem had to usher him into the boat because once the rains started, and the people didn't repent, their demise was confirmed. Noach had some faith in the outcome of redemption, which is why he needed to be reminded to board the boat. As mentioned in 7:4, the additional seven days were also included to see if the people would repent (see Rashi).

Once the end of the flood term was approaching, Noach sent a Raven, then a Dove. The first question is, why didn't Noach look outside and see whether the waters had abated? Why send a bird? A simple answer is that as soon as able, it would be proper for Noach to release the birds, whose natural environment is not the confines of a boat. Which we see in the pesukim and in Rashi's explanation: the word "Vayishalach" wasn't merely to give the birds an errand, but rather to send them back to their natural habitat—a second and esoteric answer in two parts. Part a) Since the world was destroyed, it would not be appropriate for Noach to look at its destruction (like how Lot's wife was not supposed to see Sodom be destroyed, or we know when the Egyptians were killed in the Yam Suf, the Gemara explains it is not appropriate to wallow in the demise of your enemy), so to show respect for the destruction and not wallow in his own praises, Noach sent a 'messenger' to see if the waters had abated. To support this answer, when the dove came back, it had an olive leaf in

its beak. But if the world had been destroyed, how could there have been a tree that was at the point of maturity?

To answer this, it would seem from the pesukim that Hashem didn't destroy species that didn't have a "Ruach Chaim" (breath), although the posuk says, everything on Earth will die. But the type and number of the animals is repeated multiple times, especially once again after the Mabul started in 7:15. The posuk repeated itself and said that "They with Noach into the Ark two from every species of flesh that had in it the breath of life." implying not trees or other species from the category of Tzomeach or fish which don't "breathe" (see Rashi 7:22). Similarly, in 7:21-23 Hashem repeats what was wiped out, implying that trees (and fish) did not perish.

The second part of the answer is that Hashem enacted Din on the world (like we mentioned in Bereishis, Hashem was going to create the world with Din, and he saw that it would be destroyed), for which he reintroduced comfort (Ruach). Reading Rashi on 8:1-4, we see this explanation. Vayizkor Elokim: Hashem took account; this name of Hashem (Elokim) is one of justice, and Hashem brought spirit, which means he introduced Chesed to counter the din, i.e. going back to how Hashem created the world, where it was first out of Din, then Chesed was introduced. The world operates on a balance between Din (Gevura) and Chesed. That balance is seen by the raven, who went and came

back (Yotzo, V'shuv), which in Chassidus is the ebb and flow of a Jew's relationship with Hashem. But with the Raven (who felt hated according to the Mepharshim) was relinquished of his mission, Noach chose a dove, which ultimately settled. The name Yonah would allude to a later Ir Hanidachas—the people of Nineveh—and their wayward ways. Yonah was chosen to be the person who warned them, which worked, and Nineveh repented, even with Yonah's reluctance. The Yonah, which is a calm bird and a messenger for peace, was chosen, but not without the battle of life. Meaning the Dove also had challenges finding his footing (as stated in the posuk). Similarly, Yonah himself didn't want to commit to the mission of saving Nineveh, even with the explicit instructions to do so, because Yonah represents the Jew who also (like the raven) will ebb and flow in his relationship with Hashem but will complete the mission. Drawing on Yonah's life and mission, and that name parallels the chosen bird by Noach, also not to have footing but ultimately find it³.

Now we also see how the Dove was able to get a leaf of a tree (a sign of the tree being alive, but also aged). According to Bereishis Rabba 33, the use of the word Torof (which comes from the same language as describing Yosef getting killed/mauled by the wild animal (Ber. 37:33) because the dove had killed a tree that would have become great. Bereishis

Rabba explains further that this tree came from the land of Israel, which was not affected by the Mabul (others say it came from Gan Eden). But this helps tie in other themes. Jerusalem and the cities of refuge could not be Ir Hanidachas, so this would explain why a tree remained alive and further support the idea that the area where Noach lived was an Ir Hanidachas. The expressions used by Hashem could be construed as exaggerated, (destroy everything), when we see that only breathing things were killed. So, the repetition in the pesukim is to reiterate that. It also explains how Noach had wine, i.e., there were matured fields capable of producing wine. Although this seems to contradict Rashi in 9:20, where it says Noach planted a vineyard, Rashi explains that Noach brought vine branches and fig trees onto the Teiva. But those could have been used for sustenance on the Teiva, not for replenishing the species (i.e., going back to what I stated earlier that trees were not part of the species that went onto the Teiva).

Ir Hanidachas never happened in Halacha, mostly because people repented, or the qualifications to make a city destined for destruction were too many and too strict. The fact that Hashem said in 8:21, "I will never again bring a Mabul," aligns with why there was never an Ir Hanidachas on a 'global level' as happened to the people in Noach's time.

³ See Bereishis Rabba 33

Destruction of a city would happen (as we know, Sodom was ultimately destroyed as well)⁴, but it is not the ‘norm’ of how Hashem wants the world to be.

To sum it all up, in his Maamar on the Parsha in Torah Ohr, the Alter Rebbe explains why water was chosen as the method of punishment (aligning with Mikveh and purification). I want to focus on one point: the Alter Rebbe asks why the Mabul, could Hashem not have punished the people instantaneously? This question is essential, because the destruction was performed in a “natural way”, i.e. in a method that can be explained by nature, i.e. devoid of Hashem. Therein lies the point. The fact that Hashem ‘chose’ a natural process, i.e., floods aren’t abnormal, indicates that even Hashem is in control of that. Divine providence is in the natural world, as explained by the Baal Shem Tov. The nuance of the Alter Rebbe’s point is to draw out that the entire narrative, point and outcome are by divine design. That means for us, even things that seem natural or explainable by the “order of the world” must be attributed to divine providence. As Rabbeinu Bachaya explains in Shaar Habitachon, the freest man is the one who doesn’t put his faith in other humans or the natural world; instead, he puts his faith and trust in

Hashem. Meaning, our Avoda is to constantly and continuously thank Hashem for everything, even for things explained by science and the like. This is the attribute of the Jew, who ebbs and flows like the raven and the dove until he finds his footing. But unlike the raven, who complained to Noach that he was a victim of hate, and had other cheshbonos, be like the dove, who, despite the challenges, and the ebb and flow, will eventually find their footing. This comes with our service to Hashem and the ultimate foundation, i.e., the coming of Mashiach.

When Noach left the Teiva, Hashem commanded a new moral code to be imbued in society (the basis for the 7 Noahide Laws) and redirected humanity onto a righteous path that people of the world could choose to follow. If one looks at the Pesukim and Rashi. In that case, one can find parallels between the ancient society and ours and apply the outcomes to our time, such as an immoral society where immodest relations occur, leading to a topsy-turvy world that devours itself. But we must be the Noach in our generation, and build an ark for ourselves (personally, and within our community) that will save us from the darkness. We must also be like Noach, to teach our neighbours right from wrong,

⁴ The Egyptians tried to use this against Hashem, in that they claimed that since Hashem would never cause the same wanton destruction, they would not be annihilated. But the Mepharshim

explain that this is why they were punished with their water first. As well, we see that Hashem can do anything regardless of your “cheshbonos”.

and spread the light of the Torah so that all should know that a dark world devours itself. But a world with Torah persists and survives. Even if we feel challenged or, at times, closer or further from Hashem, we are still instructed to do the job.

In conclusion, the words of the Torah are exact, and Rashi's profundity in explaining the words of the Torah is so vast. As well, the entire story of the Mabul and the times of Noach applies to us today. May we take the lessons of Noach and the precise words of the Torah to our hearts, so we may ultimately welcome Mashiach.

Good Shabbos!