

MAYBE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Who is wise and will understand these things, (who is) understanding and will know them? For the ways of HASHEM are straight; the righteous walk in them and transgressors stumble over them. (Hoshea 14:10)

How many things in life are like this? The same instrument which is a means of production for one person can be the cause of another man's demise. A bottle of wine, a telephone, a car, a bundle of money, a biological urge, or practically anything can be properly used or abused. It is not only universally true about things but ideas as well. Even the Torah can be a stepping stone or a stumbling block depending on how one either understands or mangles its meaning and message. The more potent a thing, the more it has a capacity for either constructiveness or destructiveness. At the core of this issue is a most powerful and yet private point we call "free will".

I still have ringing in my ears from more than thirty years ago in public school when a teacher told us about (excuse me), "the cruel G-d of the Old Testament" and how the later new "improved" version introduced an era of love. I sat there like a fool, frustrated and bound by blanket of ignorance. How, though, would I answer it today? Let us deal with the premise of that terrible and insulting phrase, "the cruel G-d of the Old Testament!" Was the great flood an act of a capricious cruelty? Just the opposite is true!

Our sages tell us, "There were ten generations from Adam to Noach to let you know the extent of His patience that all the generations acted infuriatingly until He brought upon them the waters of the flood. (Pirke Avos 5:2-3)

Commenting on the reason for the extension of those ten generations Rashi writes, "He was waiting for them, maybe they would -do Teshuva- return/repent!" Wow! Ten long generations! For 1656 years, day after day, moment by moment HASHEM feeds and clothes and maintains each detail of a world and a humanity that not only fails to recognize its purpose here but one that also seeks to pervert it with their own foolish and selfish agenda, while consciously thwarting the will of their Maker.

Moshe Cordovero, writes on the verse, "Who is G-d like You" (Micah 7:18- 20), "This attribute refers to the Holy One, Blessed Be He, as a tolerant King who bears insult in a manner beyond human

understanding. Without doubt, nothing is hidden from His view. In addition, there is not a moment that man is not nourished and sustained by the Divine power bestowed upon him. Thus no man ever sins against G-d without G-d, at that moment bestowing abundant vitality upon him, giving him the power to move his limbs. Yet even though a person uses this very vitality to transgress, G-d does not withhold it from him. Rather, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, suffers this insult and continues to enable his limbs to move. Even at the very moment that a person uses that power for transgression, sin, and infuriating deeds, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, bears them patiently." (Tomer Devorah)

"And it came to pass after the seven-day period that the waters of the Flood were upon the earth." (Breishis 7:10) Our sages tell us, "We learn from here that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, gave them seven days after the final decree, maybe they would do teshuvah..." (Tosefta Sota) Not only was there extraordinary patience for ten long degenerate generations but hope was extended up until and past the last days.

Understanding the extent to which the realm of free-willed choosing is exclusively our own, we come to realize that the whole world, like a tiny ark, may stay afloat because of a single word- "MAYBE!" Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.