

IMMORALITY AROUND US

by Shlomo Katz

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Noach

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Today's Learning:
Machshirin 1:5-6
Orach Chaim 3:16-4:1
Pesachim 69
Yerushalmi Pesachim 36

R' David Povarsky shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) notes a number of parallels between Noach and Adam. Most obviously, Noach and Adam each lived at the beginning of a new world. Also, Chazal teach, Noach and Adam each provided the merit in which his new world was built up.

Both Noach and Adam were tested in connection with a tree/plant and each failed the test. Just as Adam was commanded to care for all of the trees, but to avoid the Tree of Knowledge, the midrash relates that Noach was responsible for replanting all of the species of trees that had died in the flood, but he was specifically warned to exercise caution around the grape plant. The midrash further states that the vines that Noach planted grew, and their fruits ripened, on the very same day that they had been planted. This was similar to Adam's experience - on the very same day that he married Chavah, she gave birth to their first children.

In light of these similarities, it may be easier to understand why Noach succumbed to wine. [Many commentaries understand _Adam's_ sin as follows: Adam knew that by eating from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" - its full name - he would subject himself to the influence of evil. Adam _chose_ to be subjected to that influence because he believed that he could conquer it. To Adam, a person who has faced-off with evil and defeated it is greater than a person who has never been tested by evil.] Similarly, Noach knew the dangers of planting grapes but, like Adam, he _wanted_ to be challenged. [And, as with Adam, the consequences were disastrous.] (Mussar Vada'at III No.3)

"Noach walked with Elokim" (6:9)

In contrast, we are told (17:1) that Avraham walked "before Elokim." R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and author of Enayim La'mishpat) observes: The Name Elokim denotes G-d's manifestation in nature; indeed the gematria of "E- l-o-h-i-m" equals the gematria of "h-a-t-e-v-a"/"the nature." We are thus taught that Noach served G-d in a "natural" way while Avraham's service was "superhuman." Measure-for-measure, Avraham experienced "supernatural" salvation, for example, he emerged unscathed from Nimrod's furnace, whereas Noach's salvation, while miraculous, was clothed in nature (i.e., he had to take a boat). (Midrash Ariel)

Literally, the above verse says, "With Elokim, Noach walked." Why is the verse worded that way rather than saying, "Noach walked with Elokim"?

R' Moishale Taub z"l of Kaliv answers: The verse is teaching that before Noach took any step, he dedicated it to G-d. Only after he was "with Elokim" did Noach walk. (Et Ratzon)

"And He smelled the pleasing aroma . . ."

(8:21)

The midrash says that this refers to the aromas of the furnaces into which Avraham, Chananiah, Mishael, Azariah and countless later martyrs were thrown. R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (died 1909 - see page 4) explains as follows:

Rashi writes that Noach delayed entering the ark because he was "small in faith." R' Gruenwald writes: This may be understood in light of the gemara (Sukkah 28a) which refers to the logical give-and-take of the Talmudic sages Abbaye and Rava as a "small thing" and to the secrets of the kabbalah as a "great thing." Noach's belief in Hashem's command that he enter the ark was "small"; he understood _logically_ that he should enter the ark in case the world would be destroyed. However, Noach delayed entering because he thought that his contemporaries might repent at the last moment and there would not be a flood.

Logically, Noach was correct. However, Noach failed to understand that Hashem's

commandments, even the commandment to enter the ark, have a "great", i.e., a secret, kabbalistic, side to them. Once Hashem told Noah to enter the ark, Noah should have done so even if he knew that there would be no flood. Presumably, Noah grew spiritually during his year in the ark and even came to understand that "great" side of Hashem's commandments. If so, we can understand why Noah brought a sacrifice upon leaving the ark, whereas there is no record that he had ever done so before. The explanation is as follows: The early commentaries offer two reasons for bringing sacrifices. According to Rambam (Maimonides), the Torah commanded us to bring sacrifices because idolators do it and we are tempted to follow them. At least, says the Torah (according to Rambam), channel that temptation towards the true G-d.

Ramban (Nachmanides) disagrees strongly. He explains that the true understanding of the sacrificial service is a deep kabbalistic secret. Indeed, Ramban asks, how would Rambam explain Noah's bringing a sacrifice? In the first days after the flood, when Noah brought his sacrifice, there were no idolators!

Why then did Noah offer a sacrifice? Because he came to understand the "great" (i.e., secret) side of the mitzvot during his time on the ark. Part of the secret of sacrifices, according to some commentaries, is that man feels the need to sacrifice himself to G-d, but, because this is forbidden by halachah, he offers the animal as a substitute. Thus, the midrash says, when Noah offered a sacrifice, Hashem was "reminded" of the many Jews who would offer themselves as sacrifices throughout history. (Arugat Ha'bosem)

"He planted a vineyard." (9:20)

The word "va'yita"/"he planted" appears three times in the Torah - here, in the verse (Bereishit 21:33), "He planted an eishel/orchard in Be'er Sheva," and in the verse (Bereishit 2:8), "Hashem Elokim planted a garden in Eden." R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (died 1928 - see page 4) comments on this as follows:

Although Hashem created many physical pleasures, the primary purpose of life is to serve Hashem and perform His mitzvot. Thus the gemara (Kiddushin 30b) states: "He created the yetzer hara and He created the Torah as a spice for it." The Torah is a "spice" for the yetzer hara because it makes it possible to enjoy the pleasures of this world (which the yetzer hara constantly pushes upon us) in a permissible and holy manner. Specifically, if a person uses physical pleasures as a tool in his service of Hashem, then those very pleasures become part of his service. The gemara sometimes refers to a bet midrash/Torah study hall as a "vineyard." Thus, the combined message of the three verses that contain the word "va'yita" is: If one plants a vineyard, i.e., a bet midrash, then even his eishel (the acronym of the Hebrew words for eating, drinking and sleeping) may help him on his road to Eden. (Keren Le'Dovid)

R' Amram Chasida z"l

His contemporary, the Chatam Sofer, referred to R' Amram as "The prince of Elokim, a prince among the princes . . . It is well known that he is proficient in all aspects of Torah." R' Amram was born in 1790 in Hungary, and, already as a child, he yearned to settle in Eretz Yisrael. Once, when he was seven, his family noticed that he was nowhere to be seen and that his hat was missing. Setting out to find him, his father (R' Moshe Nachum) encountered a peasant who said that a young boy had passed by shortly before and asked for directions to Eretz Yisrael. When the boy's father finally caught up with him, young Amram burst into tears, "But I am on my way to Eretz Yisrael! Why are you taking me home?"

As an adult, R' Amram served as rabbi of Mad, Hungary. Not until he was 36 did he actually reach Eretz Yisrael. Settling in Tzfat, he devoted himself to developing the community there (which numbered 1,000 Jews). However, R' Amram lived in Eretz Yisrael only four years, and passed away in 1830. In his eulogy for R' Amram, the Chatam Sofer said:

He was the master of Eretz Yisrael, who took his soul in his hands and traveled with his family to the Holy Land. His desire was to settle in the holy city, Yerushalayim, but for various reasons, he was delayed in Tzfat. He wrote to me last year that he was headed to Yerushalayim, but only half of his prayers were answered [i.e., he reached the Holy Land, but not Yerushalayim].

After he taught and disseminated Torah in Tzfat for four years, he was called to the Heavenly yeshiva. The Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael wrote that he literally died from grief over the exile of the Shechinah - woe to that day. Not only was he a great person, a Torah sage and a tzaddik even when he was in the Diaspora, when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael he became as great as two of us.

He died at age 40 - how can I be consoled?

R' Amram's daughter was among the 500 Tzfat residents killed by an earthquake in 1832. The prominent Hungarian rabbis R' Moshe Gruenwald (the "Arugat Ha'bosem") and R' Eliezer David Gruenwald (the "Keren Le'David") were R' Amram's grandnephews. (Sources: Gedolei Hadorot 510; Melizei Esh, 7 Av)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
