

NEW BEGINNINGS

by Shlomo Katz

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Noach

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Today's Learning:

Bava Metzia 4:3-4

Orach Chaim 527:24-528:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 85

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 13

R' Mendel Hirsch z"l (1833-1900; eldest son of R' Samson Raphael Hirsch) observes in his commentary to this week's haftarah that Parashat Noach appears to be about destruction, but it also is about a new beginning. The parashah contains a "comforting promise" that, with or without mankind's cooperation, G-d's Will will be done and His plan for creation will be fulfilled.

In the haftarah, writes R' Hirsch, the words of the prophet Yishayah "set us in that deeply longed-for time when the Exile will have accomplished its work of purification, refinement and education." The haftarah brings "that true message to the Mother [Zion] who for so long was left lonely and grieving." "Her children have long refused to recognize her and have forsaken her. Now she receives the joyful tidings that more are coming home to her than she had ever seen about her. [In the words of the verse, 'More numerous are the children of the desolate one than the children of the one when she was united with her husband, says G-d.'] That which the times of independence and good fortune -

when they were gathered around the visible sanctuary of G-d - could not achieve, the centuries of trials in the Exile have accomplished. Those who were distant from her [Zion] in space have become near to her in spirit. Those who were once spiritually and morally estranged from her return as sons and daughters." (The Haftoroth p. 14)

"And as for Me - Hineni / Behold, I am about to bring the Flood-waters upon the earth to destroy it." (6:17)

The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 31:15) interprets: "Hineni" - Behold I agree with the words of the angels who said (Tehilim 8:5), "What is mankind that You should remember him?" [This midrash refers to an earlier midrash which relates that the angels encouraged Hashem not to create man because he would be sinful.]

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (late 19th century rabbi in Yerushalayim) writes: Surely the midrash does not mean that the angels were proven right and G-d was wrong! Rather, the midrash means the following:

The word "Hineni" always means "Here I am!" "I stand ready!" (See Rashi to Bereishit 22:1.) Hashem, too, said, "Hineni! I have always stood ready to heed the words of the angels and to destroy mankind if its deeds warranted. I, too, knew that man would sin, but I did not heed the angels in the first place because man's free will and his ability to sin are necessary for his mission on earth. Now, however, I will destroy this generation, as I have always stood ready to do if it became appropriate." (Tiferet Zion)

"I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth . . . and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." (9:13-15)

What precisely does the rainbow symbolize? R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (mashgiach of the Ponovezh Yeshiva; died 1986) explains:

Kabbalists teach that when a prophet sees the form of a circle in a vision, it symbolizes G-d's all-encompassing view of the world. Every person and every thing is seen by G-d, with no one standing out more than the others.

R' Friedlander adds: A circle has no right side, symbolizing Hashem's kindness, nor left side, symbolizing Hashem's judgment. Accordingly, says R' Friedlander, the semi-circular rainbow symbolizes G-d's promise not to judge the generation in which the rainbow appears. Were He to judge that generation, it would be found liable for punishment. Instead, the rainbow tells us, G-d will view a wicked generation as part of the continuum of history. Even if a particular generation is too wicked to survive, it will survive, and perhaps even flourish, because G-d's all-encompassing view

sees the worthy descendants who will come from the wicked generation. (Siftei Chaim: Pirkei Emunah Ve'hashgachah p. 40)

"I will not continue to curse the ground again because of man, since the imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth." (8:21)

If man's predisposition to sin is reason enough to prevent a second deluge, why was it not reason enough to forestall the Flood? R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer z"l (1815-1871) explains:

This verse refers to the fact that man forms bad habits and ideas in his youth and is not always able to rid himself of these habits and ideas after he reaches maturity. However, we know that the generations before the flood developed mentally much faster. For example, the story of Kayin and Hevel (in which they brought sacrifices and Kayin killed his brother) apparently took place when they were one day old. Accordingly, those generations did not have the excuse that our verse offers. (Ketav Sofer)

From the Midrash . . .

"Hashem saw that the wickedness of mankind was great upon the earth, and that every product of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always" (Bereishit 6:5). Thus it is written (Kohelet 6:1), "There is evil I have observed beneath the sun, and it is prevalent among mankind."

Said the Holy One, He is Blessed, "Look what these wicked ones do! When I created them, I gave each one two servants, one good [the yetzer hatov] and one bad [the yetzer hara], but they abandon the good one and attach themselves to the bad one." Thus we find that King Shlomo wrote (Kohelet 9:14-15), "There was a small town with only me'at / a few inhabitants; and a great and mighty king came upon it and surrounded it, and built great siege works over it. Present in the city was a poor wise man who, through his wisdom, saved the town. Yet no one remembered that poor man." The "small town" is the body. The "few inhabitants" are the organs of the body. The "great king" is the yetzer hara, who builds siege works to entrap the body. The "poor wise man" is the yetzer hatov, who helps the "city" escape and directs it down the path of life. Nevertheless, no one remembers that poor wise man. (Aggadat Bereishit 1:4)

R' Chanoch Zundel z"l (lived in Bialystok, Poland in the early 19th century; author of popular commentaries on Ein Yaakov and various midrashim) writes: The parable regarding the great king and the poor wise man appears to be inaccurate, for the parable has the poor wise man already inside the city when the great king lays siege to it. In contrast, Chazal teach that the yetzer hara enters a person at birth [as we read in this week's parashah (8:21), "The imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth"], while the yetzer hatov does not arrive until one becomes a bar or bat mitzvah. The parable itself alludes to this when it refers to the body's organs as the "few inhabitants." Surely the

body's organs are not few; rather the midrash means they are young when the great king lays his siege. [The word "me'at" may be translated as "few" or "little."]

The answer is as follows: The gemara teaches that man is taught the entire Torah before he is born. And, an oath is administered to him at the moment of birth that he will be righteous and not wicked. The Torah that one has learned and the oath that he took are the yetzer hatov to which the parable refers. Although one does not remember this yetzer hatov when he is born, thus permitting the great king - the yetzer hara - to lay siege to him, nevertheless, the yetzer hatov is present within man. What do the Sages mean when they say that the yetzer hatov enters a person at age 13 (or 12)? That the yetzer hatov recognizes the futility of fighting the yetzer hara while a person is still immature, and that it therefore remains out of sight. It is during those 13 years that "no one remembers that poor wise man." (Etz Yosef)

R' Dr. Hillel Hakohen Klein z"l

R' Dr. Hillel (Philip) Hakohen Klein, one of the leading rabbis of New York in the first quarter of the 20th century, was born in Baratzka, Hungary in 1849. He was a child prodigy and at the young age of 12 was accepted to the Pressburg Yeshiva headed by R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (the "Ketav Sofer"). Four years later, he enrolled in the yeshiva of R' Dr. Ezriel Hildesheimer in Eisenstadt, Hungary.

One of the stated goals of the Eisenstadt yeshiva was to train rabbis who would be capable of combating the Reform movement. To further that goal, the students, including young Hillel Klein, were taught German and classical languages alongside limudei kodesh / sacred studies.

By age 17, Hillel Klein was already a lecturer in the Eisenstadt yeshiva. Two years later, he left Eisenstadt for Vienna, where he entered a Gymnasium (high school) and later university. He also was invited by Vienna's Orthodox rabbi, R' Zalman Spitzer (brother-in-law of the Ketav Sofer), to give a daily gemara lecture in his synagogue, the renowned Schiffshul.

In 1869, R' Hildesheimer invited his former student to assist him in opening a new rabbinical seminary in Berlin. In 1871, R' Klein received semichah / ordination from R' Binyamin Zvi Auerbach of Halberstadt and from R' Hildesheimer. In 1873, he received his doctorate from the University of Berlin.

In 1875, we find R' Klein in Kiev, Russia as the personal tutor to the son of Israel Brodsky, one of the wealthiest Jews of the time. (Brodsky had contributed the funds necessary to found the kollel of the Volozhiner yeshiva.) Five years later, R' Klein moved again, accepting the appointment to the rabbinate of Libau (Liepaja), Latvia.

In Libau, R' Klein had the unusual role of being both the official rabbi and the rabbi who was accepted by the Orthodox community. (The official rabbi was required to have a secular education

and, in many communities, did not possess the Torah scholarship the community demanded.) Perhaps because he was different from other official rabbis, R' Klein was eventually expelled from Libau by the government.

In 1890, R' Yaakov Yosef, the Chief Rabbi of New York, suggested to Congregation Ohab Zedek on Manhattan's Lower East Side that it engage R' Klein as its rabbi. (The shul's chazzan was Yossele Rosenblatt.) Soon after his arrival in New York, R' Klein was appointed to the additional position of dayan / rabbinical judge on R' Yosef's court. R' Klein was deeply involved in kashruth supervision in New York City and assumed increasing responsibility as R' Yosef's health failed. Together with R' Dr. Bernard Drachman and Rev. Dr. Pereira Mendes, R' Klein worked to convince factory owners to close on Shabbat and to hire Sabbath-observant workers. In addition, women were encouraged not to shop on Shabbat, and stores in Jewish neighborhoods were encouraged to close. R' Klein also was involved in arbitrating labor disputes that led to better working conditions for shoachim and for matzah bakers.

In 1902, R' Klein was appointed President of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, then the only yeshiva in the United States. In that capacity, he led the drive for the yeshiva's first permanent building and he led a campaign to clearly establish that the Jewish Theological Seminary had left the Orthodox fold and was not a yeshiva. In 1906, R' Klein established the "Semichah Board" of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, and awarded what might have been the first ordinations granted on American soil.

R' Klein was involved in founding or leading many other organizations including the charity Ezras Torah and Agudath Israel of America. R' Klein's wife was Julie Hirsch, daughter of R' Mendel Hirsch, the eldest son of R' Samson Raphael Hirsch. They were married in 1881. R' Klein died on March 21, 1926.

Sponsored by: Mrs. Esther Liberman and family in memory of husband and father Yaakov Azriel ben Aharon David a"h

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