

"G-D WATCHES OVER MAN"

by Shlomo Katz

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Parashat Noach
Volume XVIII, No. 2:
6 Marcheshvan 5764
November 1, 2003**

**Sponsored by
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Today's Learning:

Ohalot 10:1-2

O.C. 113:4-6

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Menachot 26

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Moed Kattan 8

R' Yehoshua Ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; early 14th century) writes: In Parashaht Bereishit, the Torah teaches us the fundamental fact that G-d created the world. In the present parashah, the Torah teaches us two more fundamentals of Judaism - hashgachah, i.e., that G-d watches, and watches over, man; and sechar va'onesh, i.e., that G-d rewards or punishes man based on his deeds. The principle of hashgachah is found in the verse (6:12), "G-d saw the earth and behold it was corrupted." The

principle of sechar va'onesh is evident in the fact that G-d punished the generation of the flood, but rewarded Noah.

Noah himself had to learn these principles, writes R' Ibn Shuiv. Our Sages state that Noah lacked a certain degree of faith (see Rashi to 7:6). R' Ibn Shuiv explains that Noah had some doubts about the concept of hashgachah. This is why he brought olot / burnt offerings after the flood (Bereishit 8:20). An olah atones for improper thoughts, in this case, Noah's doubts. Also, the gematria of olot (:-3) equals 500. The midrash explains that the Torah wrote the word olot without the letter "vav" specifically to reach that gematria, for "500 years" is said to be the distance from heaven to earth. In other words, R' Ibn Shuiv explains, Noah brought a korban whose gematria equaled 500 because he had wondered whether the distance from heaven to earth (500) kept G-d from watching man's every deed. This is also why the Egyptians were struck with 500 plagues, as described in the Pesach Haggadah. Note that the gematria of the Hebrew acronym of the plagues - "detzach adash b'achav" - also equals 500 (with the help of the gematria rule that permits disregarding a difference of one). (Derashot R"Y Ibn Shuiv)

"For in seven more days time I will send rain upon the earth . . ." (7:4)

What happened during these seven days? Our Sages offer three answers: (1) For seven days, the sun rose in the west and set in the east; (2) G-d mourned His world for seven days; and (3) Those were the seven days of mourning for the tzaddik Metushelach, who died a week before the Flood.

R' Aryeh Yehuda Laib Teomim z"l (Poland; died 1831) writes in the name of his father, R' Yosef Teomim z"l (rabbi of Posen; died 1782): The second and third answers cited above are obviously consistent with each other. Once Metushelach, the greatest living tzaddik, died, the Flood became inevitable. Therefore, G-d mourned both Metushelach and the rest of Creation. However, how does the first answer, that for seven days the sun rose in the west and set in the east, relate to the other answers?

R' Teomim explains: The Gemara (Sanhedrin 91b) relates that the Roman Emperor Antonius asked the sage Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi (known simply as "Rebbe"): "Why does the sun set in the west?"

Rebbe answered: "Because it goes to greet its creator, as we read in Nechemiah (9:6) [and recite in our daily prayers], 'The heavenly legion bows to You'." Rashi explains that the Shechinah is found in the west; therefore the sun "bows" to the west. [The explanation of this statement is beyond the scope of this publication, but note that the Kodesh Hakadashim, the holiest part of the Bet Hamikdash, was at the western end of the Temple.]

Based on this, says R' Teomim, we can understand why the sun rose in the west and set in the east for the seven days before the Flood. Usually, the sun sets in the west in order to "greet" G-d. However, G-d was "in mourning" during those seven days, and it is halachically improper to greet a

mourner.

(Ya'alat Chen)

"G-d caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided." (8:1)

R' Levi ben Gershon z"l ("Ralbag"; 1288-1344) lists ten lessons we learn from the story of the Flood. He writes in part: The seventh lesson is that when G-d performs miracles, He does it in a way that is as close as possible to the regular workings of nature. For example, He made the Flood appear to be the result of an abundance of water in natural underground springs and in the clouds, rather than creating a new water source. Likewise, when it was time to remove the Flood waters, He caused a wind to blow, for the wind naturally dries the earth after a rain.

The reason G-d operates in this way is that the laws of nature which He created are as perfect as can be. Thus, when it is necessary to deviate from those laws, it is logical that He should deviate as little as possible.

Ralbag adds: The foregoing is the opposite of what many uninformed people among our own brethren think. When they speak of a miracle, they attempt to describe it as being as contrary to nature as possible, thinking that they are thus giving glory to G-d. In fact, the opposite is true.

(Peirush Al Ha'Torah Al Derech Beur)

"Hashem descended to look at the city and tower which the sons of man built. Hashem said, 'Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do! And now, it will not be withheld from them all they propose to do.'" (11:5-6)

Rabbeinu Nissim z"l ("Ran"; Spain; 14th century) writes: The commentaries have left obscure the explanation of the sin of the Dor Ha'palagah / the Generation of the Separation (i.e., the generation that built the Tower of Babel) and the reason for the generation's punishment. If the generation's intention was to ensure that it remained united as one people, then they deserved a reward, not punishment. After all, our Sages say: "Even if men worship idols, so long as there is peace among them, the Attribute of Justice does not act against them." And if their intention was to ascend to the heavens [and attack G-d], one can ask several questions. First, how could nearly all the members of the generation agree to such a silly plan? Second, if all of the people were fools, should G-d be angry with them? Their own foolishness should exempt them from punishment. G-d's reaction should have been as the verse (Tehilim 2:4) says, "He Who sits in heaven will laugh, the Lord will mock them." Third, if they had been heretics and blasphemers, would changing their language and dispersing them across the earth have been sufficient punishment? Finally, it seems clear from the verses that they were not dispersed for anything they did, but rather for what they might do in the future.

The answer to these questions may be found in the following axiom: Any gathering of wicked people is bad, whether or not they are actively engaged in an evil undertaking. The mere fact that they congregate together strengthens the ties that bind them, thereby increasing their ability to work together in the future, pursuing their evil designs. (Conversely, any gathering of righteous people is good, even if they are not working together on a particular project at that moment.)

This explains the fate of the Dor Ha'palagah. At that particular time in history, most people were idolators and heretics. Also, they all spoke the same language. Finally, they agreed to unite under one king - the evil Nimrod - and to live together in one valley around the enormous palace that they would build for that king - a tower, with its top in the heavens. Their plan was not sinful in and of itself, but Hashem foresaw that it was a recipe for disaster. After all, this was the same Nimrod who had been Avraham's nemesis. [Note that the Torah is not written in chronological order. Avraham was already an adult when the Tower of Babel was built and the generation dispersed.] The foregoing sheds new light on the verse: "Hashem descended to look at the city and tower which the sons of man built." So-to- speak, He came down to look closely at their plans and ascertain the likely outcome.

(Derashot Ha'Ran, No. 1)

R' Yehonasan Eyebchutz z"l - note that he died in 1764 - explains the purpose of the Tower of Babel as follows: The people of that generation feared another flood, and they thought that the only safe place for them was on the moon. They knew, however, that launching a spaceship out of the earth's atmosphere was beyond their capabilities. Therefore, they decided to build a tower with its top in the heavens, i.e., near the top of the atmosphere, and they planned to launch their ships to the moon from there.

(Tiferet Yehonatan)

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 Hungary in 1790, 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 Tzefat, he devoted himself to developing the community there (which numbered 1,000 Jews). However, R' Amram lived in Eretz Yisrael for 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 Tzefat. 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 Tzefat 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, but 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 Tzefat 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.
