

BACK TO THE DAILY GRIND

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Noach

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Volume 19, No. 2

1 Cheshvan 5765

October 16, 2004

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

Yitzchok and Barbara Lehman Siegel and family
on the yahrzeits of
uncle Raphael ben Avraham a"h (Abe Firestein) (18 Tishrei)
and grandmother Chana bat Yitzchak a"h (Annie Siegel) (Simchat Torah)

Today's Learning:

Berachot 3:6-4:1

O.C. 297:5-298:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Temurah 33

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 46

R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch z"l (rabbi of Frankfurt a.M.; died 1888) writes about the month that begins today: The solemn yet joyous month of the festivals is past, and we now enter the placid and quiet month of Cheshvan [the only month of the Jewish calendar that has no observances of any kind]. What a significant month Cheshvan can be if we have been fully imbued with the spirit of Tishrei, R' Hirsch declares. School, home, business and community all now commence a tranquil half-year [until Pesach] of striving and enjoyment. Boys and girls have returned to school, young men and young women have resumed their preparations for life, workers have returned to the full-time pursuit of their occupations, and mothers at home to their quiet, unheralded caring for their families.

When they all assemble at home each evening, every cottage becomes a sanctuary, every table an altar, and every breath, a hymn to G-d.

Our task now is to truly be Jews, R' Hirsch continues. We must have the courage to build our homes as Jews, to conduct our married life as Jews, to educate our children as Jews, to enlighten our minds and warm our hearts as Jews, to enliven our conversation and plan our action as Jews, and to consecrate our enjoyments as Jews. If we could only carry all this out in the Jewish spirit, in the complete Jewish spirit, then we might confidently await all the blessings that would result from such a way of life. (Adapted from Collected Writings Vol. II p.147)

"Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations . . ." (6:9)

"If for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation." (7:1)

The latter verse does not say that Noach was perfect, only righteous. Why? R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (1853-1911; rabbi of Khust, Hungary, now Ukraine) explains: In his own right, Noach was righteous but not perfect. However, when his merits were coupled with those of the myriads of tzaddikim who were destined to descend from him, it was as if he was perfect. Thus, he was "perfect in his generations," but only "righteous . . . in this generation."

(Arugat Ha'bosem)

"Noach walked with G-d." (6:9)

Regarding the Patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov - we read (24:40), "[G-d] before whom I walked," and (48:16), "G-d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked." What is the difference between walking with G-d, as Noach did, and before G-d, as the Patriarchs did?

Also, we are commanded (Devarim 13:5), "After Hashem, your G-d, you shall walk." What does this mean? Rashi indicates that walking with G-d is a lower level than walking before G-d; presumably, then, walking after G-d is an even lower level. Why does the Torah command us to walk after G-d?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains:

Following Adam's sin, mankind's mission has been to rectify the spiritual damage that he caused. For reasons of His own, G-d does not desire that the damage be corrected all at once. Rather, it is a gradual process. Similarly, G-d reveals Himself only gradually, a little bit in each generation in proportion to that generation's share in repairing the damage that Adam's sin caused.

Walking "with" G-d, as Noach did, means serving G-d on the level demanded from one's own generation. Noach served G-d perfectly to the extent that was expected of him, but he made no impression outside of his particular "area" of service. In contrast, Avraham walked "before" G-d, i.e., he was not content to fulfill his duty and no more. Avraham sought to expand his sphere of influence to both the wayward members of his own generations and to his descendants. Avraham sought to rectify a greater portion of the damage Adam had done than Avraham's generation was expected to rectify.

But we can speak of a gradual rectification of the sin only before the Torah was given. One could set a goal to do more than his share only before Hashem gave us the tool - the Torah - to rectify everything. With the tool that we have, we had the ability to return the world to its perfect state a long time ago. (Indeed, this was almost accomplished at the time of the Giving of the Torah, before the Golden Calf was made.) Since then, we are playing "catch-up," and that is why the best we can be commanded is to walk "after" G-d.

(Midbar Shur: Drush 13)

"Two of each shall come to you to keep alive." (6:20)

"Of every kosher animal take unto you seven pairs." (7:2)

Why did the non-kosher animals and birds come to the Ark of their own accord, while Noach had to gather the kosher animals?

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) answers: Since some of the kosher animals were destined to be offered as sacrifices, G-d did not decree that they should come to Noach of their own accord.

R' Simcha Mordechai Ziskind Broide z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) elaborates further: G-d created animals with the instinct for self-preservation. This is an element the "yashrut" / "justice, fairness and integrity" with which Hashem created the world; i.e., it is only fair that every creature have the instinct to preserve its own life. It was that instinct that drove two animals of each species to go to Noach and obtain a space on the Ark.

However, the instinct for self-preservation could not drive the kosher animals to the Ark, since going to the Ark meant eventual death for some of them. It is true, observes R' Broide, that these animals would preserve their lives for a full year by being in the Ark rather than outside, in the flood waters. Nevertheless, it would not have been yashar for Hashem to implant in the animals an urge to go to their own deaths.

(Hayashar Ve'hatov p.9)

"Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard." (9:20)

How did Noach fall to such a low level? R' Avraham Saba z"l (late 15th-early 16th centuries) explains: At first, Noach was called (verse 6:9) a "righteous" and "perfect" man. Later, after he failed to pray for his generation's salvation, he was called (verse 7:1) "righteous," but not "perfect." Finally, because almost the entire earth was wiped out "on his watch," so-to-speak, he was called a "man of the earth."

Alternatively, R' Saba writes, the "vineyard" may symbolize the secrets of Kabbalah. Perhaps Noach attempted to reach levels for which he was not prepared and thus became "intoxicated."

(Tzror Ha'mor)

"[S]ince the yetzer / inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (8:21)

A visitor once entered the home of R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; approx. 1838-1933) and found the elderly sage trying to feed his toddler son Aharon. [This was son from the Chafetz Chaim's second marriage when he was almost 70 years old.] The boy was seated in a high chair, and his father was coaxing him, "Eat, Ahrele! Eat, Ahrele!" The boy, however, refused to eat.

Noticing his visitor, the Chafetz Chaim asked: "Do you know why the boy won't eat? It is the work of the yetzer hara." He explained: "The Torah says that the yetzer hara is implanted in a person from his youth. But what can the yetzer hara say to a toddler? He says, 'Don't eat, so you will be sick and won't have to go to cheder'."

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter, published in She'eilot U'teshuvot Keren Le'David (No. 13), was written by R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald z"l (died 1928), a prominent Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva. It is in response to a rabbi whose congregant had disobeyed an order to cover his head with a tallit while leading the services. When the rabbi protested, part of the congregation argued that the rabbi had no right to insist on such a practice. In his letter, R' Gruenwald discusses the origin of the custom that the chazzan covers his head with a tallit, and also discusses the authority of rabbis in general.

Regarding whether the chazzan must cover his head with a tallit, the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 17b) says about the verse (Shmot 34:6), "Hashem passed before him and called out" - "If the Torah had not said this, we could never say it. The verse is teaching that Hashem wrapped himself like a chazzan and taught Moshe how to pray the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy." [The expression "Hashem passed" is reminiscent of the expression used in the Mishnah for leading the prayers - "To pass before the lectern."] From this, the sage Magen Avraham derived that the chazzan must always cover his head, in contrast to the sage Levush who said that only during the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. After all, the Gemara implies that Hashem "wrapped Himself" the way every chazzan does. [R' Gruenwald continues to discuss both sides of the question and concludes that the better custom is for the chazzan to cover his head, though he acknowledges that it is not the universally accepted custom.]

In any case, that chazzan who refused to cover his head despite an express command of the rabbi acted in a hefker / free-for-all way, and one must examine whether he is one of the reformers. [Ed. note: In this period, many congregations in Hungary were fighting difficult battles to preserve their Torah-true identities.] And, certainly, those congregants who dared to stand up to insult the rabbi, they should be penalized, and it is forbidden for you to forgive them. Although a talmid chacham generally may forego the honor due him, but not when the honor of the Torah and its judges is disgraced.

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