

MAKE IT A HABIT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Noach

Make it a Habit

We read in our parashah that Noach sent out a dove to investigate whether there was dry land. We read (8:11), "The dove came back to him in the evening -- and behold! It had plucked an olive leaf with its bill." Rashi z"l comments: She meant to say, "Better that my food be bitter as an olive but from the hand of G-d, rather than as sweet as honey and from the hand of mortal men."

Similarly, observes R' Alter Chanoch Henach Leibowitz z"l (1918-2008; rosh yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in Queens, N.Y.), our Sages say that a person who receives a gift or a favor from another person feels demeaned thereby. Yet, R' Leibowitz continues, our experience is that we don't feel that way. Why? Because we are so accustomed to receiving gifts and favors that we have become desensitized to how we should feel. [Ed. note: Among the reasons we *should* feel that way is that, like the dove, we should want all our needs to be fulfilled directly by Hashem, not through intermediaries. Also, we should strive to emulate Hashem, and He, by definition, cannot accept gifts since He is All-Powerful and owns everything.]

The lesson for us, R' Leibowitz continues, is that habit has a powerful influence on a person. Therefore, a person must be on his guard. Works of mussar / character development teach that mussar has three parts: (1) possessing abstract knowledge of how one should behave, (2) learning mussar works with an enthusiasm that influences a person, and (3) training ourselves to act consistently in accordance with the teachings of mussar until it becomes habit. (Chiddushei Ha'lev)

"The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth." (6:13)

If man sinned, why were the animals punished? R' Yosef Bechor Shor z"l (12th century; France) explains: Everything was created for man's benefit. [If man is destroyed, there is no need for the rest of existence.] (Bechor Shor)

"Elokim said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I give between Me and you, and every living being that is with you, to generations forever. I have placed My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth'." (9:12-13)

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; Spain and Eretz Yisrael; 1194-1270) writes: At first glance, these verses imply that the rainbow did not exist before and Hashem now created a new phenomenon. The reason the rainbow serves as a sign is that it symbolizes a bow pointed *away* from the earth, as if to say, "I will not fling my arrows at you."

However, Ramban continues, we necessarily must believe the words of the Greeks that the sun shining on the moisture in the sky causes a rainbow to appear. And, when we focus on the words of the verse, we will understand that this is true. It says, "I *have* placed My rainbow in the cloud," not, "I *am* placing My rainbow in the cloud." The reference is to something that was created a long time ago, not something being created now. Furthermore, it says, "**My* rainbow," referring to the rainbow that G-d already has from the time of Creation. Accordingly, Ramban explains, the correct interpretation of the verses is as follows: "This natural phenomenon which I created before will henceforth serve as a sign of My covenant with mankind." (Ramban Al Ha'Torah)

R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shlah Ha'kadosh; Prague and Eretz Yisrael; died 1630) writes: I heard in the name of R' Moshe Isserles z"l (Rema; Krakow, Poland; 1520-1572) that, although the rainbow is a natural phenomenon, it does not have to occur. Our Sages say that, if we merited, rain would fall only at night, when it would not interfere as much with man's activities. It follows that, if we merited, we would never see a rainbow. Indeed, the Gemara (Ketubot 77b) records that no rainbows appeared in the generation of the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. In short, the appearance of a rainbow is a sign that we are not meritorious, and that Hashem must "remind" Himself not to destroy us in a flood. (Shnei Luchot Ha'Berit: Torah Ohr)

From the Haftarah . . .

"Behold! I have created a charash who blows on a charcoal flame and withdraws a tool for his labor, and I have created the destroyer to ruin. Any weapon sharpened against you shall not succeed, and any tongue that rises against you in judgment you shall condemn; this is the heritage of the servant of Hashem, and their righteousness is from Me,' the words of Hashem." (Yeshayah 54:16-17)

Rashi z"l explains: "I, Hashem, created the one who forged weapons to use against you, and I am also

the One who created the force that destroyed him. In other words, I, Hashem, am the One who sent enemies to attack you and I am the One who sent others to defeat those enemies."

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers an allegorical interpretation of these verses. He writes: We will read in next week's haftarah (Yeshayah 41:7), "The charash encourages the tzoreif." Midrash Rabbah interprets a "charash" as a carpenter and says that it refers to Shem son of Noach, who helped to build the ark. "Tzoreif" / smith, the midrash says, refers to Avraham, who was purified in a furnace, as gold is purified.

R' Kluger continues, citing R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; died 1444): Heretics ask, "If Hashem knew when He created the world that the Generation of the Flood and the Generation of the Dispersal (i.e., the builders of the Tower of Babel) would sin, why did He create them?" R' Albo answers with an analogy to a person who plants a tree--he knows that he will have to prune some branches so that others can flourish. That is not failure; that's how growth occurs. Similarly, it was always part of Hashem's plan that mankind would purify itself through a process that would span many generations.

Avraham Avinu was the culmination of this process and, as noted, he was purified in a furnace like gold. Thus, our verses teach, do not fear the existence of evil. Its existence is part of the process of purification, and we can count on Hashem to keep it in check. All of the events between the wicked Generation of the Flood--the generation of Shem, the "charash," who helped to build the ark--and the wicked Generation of the Dispersal--the generation of Avraham, the one "who blows on a charcoal flame"--were merely part of this process. [Avraham was 48 years old when the tower was built.]

Moreover, when the righteous person witnesses evil, he is repulsed and becomes more righteous. Thus our verse concludes, "Their righteousness is *from Me*." I, Hashem, created the conditions that allow the righteous to become righteous. (Kohelet Yaakov: Bein Ha'meitzarim p.251)

Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (1871-1962; the "Maggid / preacher of Yerushalayim), describes in his memoirs, B'tuv Yerushalayim, the efforts that parents made to raise their children in sanctity:

When a young boy began to understand, his mother would tell him age-appropriate stories which increased his desire to learn Torah for its own sake so that, G-d willing, he would grow up to become a gadol b'Yisrael / a great person among the Jewish People. . .

When he was approximately one year old, they would dress him in a yarmulke, short for "yarei Malka" / "one who is in awe of the King." . . .

When a boy was old enough and his parents merited to enroll him in cheder, his father carried him to cheder wrapped him in a talit so that he would not see anything "impure" in the streets which would damage his pure eyes. When he reached the cheder, the teacher would toss candy and coins in the air. The young boy might believe that the angels themselves were throwing candy at him because the teacher explained to him that he deserved these rewards for beginning to learn the aleph-bet and that, the more he studied, the more rewards he would deserve.

On the day when he became a bar mitzvah, his parents would take care that he spent the entire day studying Torah and engaging in holy pursuits. Also, they watched that he would not say anything improper the entire night, especially not an expression of anger. This is in accordance with the mussar works which state that parents must guard a bar mitzvah boy to ensure that he does not commit the slightest sin on the day of his bar mitzvah and that he engages only in Torah study and service of Hashem the entire day.

How far we have fallen [R' Yadler continues]. . . Mothers sing their babies to sleep with secular love songs which are prohibited. When their sons are older, they do not take care to cover their heads. . . . Woe to us!

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 **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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