

# THE EXCITEMENT OF EVERY DAY

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Noach

R' Samson 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 conversations and plan our actions 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. (Collected Writings Vol. II p.147)

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"Noach was a righteous man . . ." (6:9)

What is the defining characteristic of a righteous man? R' Yosef Kahaneman z"l (1886-1969; the "Ponovezher Rav") would regularly say: A tzaddik is good-hearted. This is illustrated in our parashah, where Noach is described as a tzaddik. What do we know about Noach? That he cared for thousands of living things. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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"Elokim said to Noach, '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)

Pirkei Avot (ch. 5) teaches: "There were ten generations from Adam to Noach. This teaches how patient G-d is, for all the generations angered Him until He eventually brought a flood upon them."

R' Naftali Hertz Wiesel z"l (Germany; 1725-1805) comments: The author of this Mishnah wondered why the Torah provides the complete pedigree from Adam to Noach. Why didn't the Torah just say: "Many years passed, people sinned, and Noach was born"?

Apparently, the Torah wants to teach us a lesson. We read in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy in Parashat Ki Tissa that G-d is patient, but we are not told how patient He is. Therefore, says the author of our Mishnah, the Torah lists all of the generations from Adam to Noach to teach that G-d's patience lasts for ten [long] generations.

There are other lessons here as well, R' Wiesel continues: First, we learn that G-d is patient even with those who are thoroughly evil. Our Mishnah says that G-d was patient with each of the ten generations from Adam to Noach. This implies that each was deserving in its own right to be wiped out in a flood. Yet G-d was patient with them.

Finally, we learn that G-d is patient even though this creates an appearance that evil people get away with their deeds. Although the nine generations before Noach also deserved to be flooded, as just mentioned, the members of those generations apparently died peaceful deaths in their beds. Though it may appear to us that they were not called to account for their sins, we can rest assured that that is not the case. (Yain Ha'levanon)

R' Ovadiah Yosef z"l (1920-2013; leading halachic authority and Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) writes: A midrash describes the immense kindness that G-d showered on those generations, despite which they were ungrateful and rebelled against Him. For example, says the midrash, one season of planting sufficed to sustain those generations for forty years. The people in that era could walk from one end of the world to the other in a very short time. [Note that this midrash was written 1,000 years before archaeologists and anthropologists began to discover and theorize about traces of civilization in the most distant reaches of the globe.] Lions and tigers were no more frightening to them than were lice. The weather was always perfect. And, a newborn baby was so developed that he could reach out, pick up a knife, and cut his own umbilical cord.

R' Yosef continues, quoting the Gemara (Sanhedrin 108a): Despite this easy life--in fact, because of it--the generation of the Flood became haughty and rebelled. About that generation Iyov said (Iyov 21:9-15): "Their homes are peaceful . . . their children prance about . . . They spend their days with good fortune . . . They said to G d, 'Go away from us! We have no desire to know Your ways! What is the Almighty that we should serve Him?'" (Anaf Etz Avot p.322)

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"And, as for you, take for yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to yourself, that it shall be as food for you and for them." (6:21)

The Gemara states, as if quoting Hashem, "The entire world is sustained in the merit of My son, Chaninah [one of the sages of the Mishnah]." This means, explains R' Elazar Shapira z"l (1808-1865; Rebbe of Lancut; son of the author of Bnei Yissaschar), that the tzaddik of the generation is the conduit through which blessing and sustenance flow to the entire world. Ironically, that tzaddik does not need to work hard to support himself. Even if he performs only a token act of hishtadlut / physical effort, he finds his sustenance.

R' Shapira continues: This lesson is learned from our verse. How so? Because Hashem told Noach to take food for all of the creatures that would be on the Ark, but Hashem never told Noach how long their stay on the Ark would be. It seems that it did not matter. As long as Noach performed some modest hishtadlut, the sustenance of all the creatures on the Ark would be guaranteed in his merit. (Yod'ai Binah)

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"These are the descendants of the sons of Noah -- Shem, Cham, and Yefet . . ." (10:1)

To what end does the Torah list the families that descended from Noah? Likewise, for what purpose does the Torah list (in last week's parashah) the generations that preceded Noah?

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) quotes R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) who explains: The Torah is addressing those who deny the relative youth of the universe and cite as supposed proof the fact that mankind is dispersed over the entire globe, a process which arguably should have taken much longer than the 2,500 years from Creation until the Giving of the Torah. To this the Torah says: I can account for the entire history of mankind. Early generations lived hundreds of years and fathered extraordinary numbers of children. I, the Torah, can even name the fathers of all of the major nations. Furthermore, there was a cataclysmic event -- the dispersion of the generation that tried to build the Tower of Babel -- which accounts for mankind's filling the earth. (Derashat Torat Hashem Temimah)

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## Shemittah

We continue our historical overview of the controversy surrounding the "hetter mechirah," the sale of the Land of Israel to a non-Jew for the shemittah year. We related last week that four leading rabbis--R' Shmuel Mohilever z"l of Bialystok, R' Yehoshua Trunk z"l of Kutna, R' Shmuel Zanvil Klepfisch z"l of Warsaw, and R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l of Kovno-- ruled prior to

the shemittah of 5649 / 1888-89 that the land of Eretz Yisrael could be sold to a non-Jew, and that certain work on the Land thereby could continue during the shemittah. This ruling was issued at the request of confidants of Baron Edmund de Rothschild, who was financing several of Eretz Yisrael's nascent agricultural settlements. Here we present excerpts from R' Spektor's ruling. The halachic basis for this ruling, in particular, the fact that shemittah is anyway not applicable according to Torah law in our era, will be examined in future issues.

I was asked several months ago to express my opinion regarding the colonies of Jews who are sustained by working the soil of our Holy Land, as the shemittah year of 5649 is approaching, may it be for good, and if we don't seek a solution for them it is possible that the Land will become desolate, G-d forbid, and the colonies will be destroyed, G-d forbid, which affects the lives of hundreds of people . . . I propose to permit [certain shemittah restrictions] by selling the fields and vineyards, they and their produce, to Moslems for a two year period [the shemittah and the year after, for reasons that will be explained in a future issue]. After that time, the fields and vineyards will return to their owners. The sale must be specifically to a Moslem [which also will be explained in a future issue]. I previously wrote a pamphlet about this, but I did not want to be relied upon in practice regarding such a novel matter when I was a lone voice. However, now that I have received a letter that my friends [the rabbis mentioned above] dealt with this matter and also granted permission . . . therefore, I now publicize my opinion to be relied upon in practice. . . The work in the fields should be done by a non-Jew. However, if there are poor people who cannot afford to hire non-Jewish workers, we will discuss the matter with those other sages. . . We state expressly that this permission is granted only for the year 5649, and not for future shemittot, at which time the matter will have to be revisited [to see if the need at that time justifies this leniency]. May Hashem help that they will not need this permission. . . The language of the actual [sale] contract should be worked out in the bet din in Yerushalayim and with its consent. (Nachshonei Ha'shemittah p.109)

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

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