

DISSECTIONS AND CONNECTIONS

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

The parsha chronicles the continuation of the downward spiral of man's behavior as it evolved from the beginning of creation. We read of Kayin and Hevel, two brothers who could have lived in peace and unity, benefiting together from the beautiful world. But Kayin surrendered to jealousy and hatred and killed Hevel. The degeneration of humanity continued until in this week's Parsha, we find Hashem condemning the entire world to destruction.

It's interesting to note that civilization's fate was sealed not for man's crimes towards His Creator, but because of his inability to respect the rights of his fellow man. The Torah tells us 'vatimalay ha'aretz chamas', society was so degenerate that robbery and injustice went unpunished. Because they failed to maintain a lawful and peaceful society, they were doomed.

Since the times of the mabul, the Great Flood, the underpinnings of civilization has been the understanding that the only way to preserve stability within a society is to maintain a sense of community enforced by a system of government, buttressed by alliances with other nations. The United Nations was meant to be the most powerful embodiment of the concept of nations joining together to ensure world peace and freedom from oppression. Delegates to the United Nations gather together from every recognized state with the stated purpose of upholding these noble ideals.

However, because so many member nations have subverted the U.N.'s lofty ideas with their own selfish agendas, the institution has been rendered a hollow charade. While poetic and eloquent speeches flow from its podium, both blatant and behind-the-scene corruption has become the norm for the world body.

The lesson of the failure of this grand institution is that true unity is only achieved when nations and individuals surrender their individual needs for the higher common good. This seems to be the underlying message of the Parsha and the lesson that mankind was to glean from in the aftermath of the flood.

In order to rectify the corruption and disunity that resulted in mankind's obliteration, Hashem took Noach and all the species of the world and placed them in the incubated and protected environment of the ark for an extended period. It was here that they co-existed not simply because it was pleasant to function in an orderly environment. For peace to persevere, the interactions in the ark had to be elevated to a level where each one's needs took second place to the well-being of the

entire assemblage. All were thus bonded in a deep and lasting cohesion.

Furthermore, the ark, explain the commentaries, was similar to a mishkan where all components served an equally vital role in serving as integral cogs whose overall purpose was to reveal Hashem's presence to all. As the Torah tells us, 'vayishaer ach noach vechol asher ito bateiva;' Noach humbly remained "Noach" with all who were with him in the ark. He was not haughty at being the selected survivor of Hashem but rather equated himself with the other species, cognizant that he, no less than all the creatures around him, lived only to fulfill His will. The ability of those in the ark to live in harmony demonstrated the unity of Creator and creation.

Our society has lifted the banner of superficial unity to a lofty plane. Creating a global village where human rights reign in an enlightened society sounds wonderful on paper. But if, at the end of the day, these developments serve only to facilitate the aggrandizement of private individuals and corporations, they are destined to fail. Only when mankind recognizes that its overarching mission is to dedicate itself to the moral and ethical roadmap the Creator has charted for us, can world society move forward to a lasting peace.

The very first step towards that exalted goal is ensuring that within our own little microcosm, we devote ourselves to carrying out this mission vis a vis our fellow man; using the Creator's blueprint-the Torah-to mold our outlook and our behavior. Only thus can we launch ourselves on the path to true harmony and inner peace.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos.

Sincerely,

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