

MIRACLES CAN HAPPEN SLOWLY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 389, Abortion To Save A Baby? Good Shabbos

A Treifah Olive Branch?

I saw an interesting insight in the sefer [book] Mikdash Mordechai. The Torah says that an olive branch was torn off in the mouth of the dove (taraf b'phee-ha) [Bereishis 8:11]. This is an interesting use of the verb 'taraf' [to tear]. Normally, 'taraf' is used in connection with something which has been killed, usually violently [as in Bereishis 37:33, by Yosef]. For example, the primary definition of 'treifah' is a living animal that was torn apart in the field.

It is peculiar to refer to an olive branch as being killed. The Torah is certainly not saying that ripping off an olive branch is murder.

The Mikdash Mordechai comments that when a person has seen the destruction that Noach witnessed -- all forms of life had been erased from the world -- he attaches a new importance to even the smallest form of life.

Therefore, an olive branch that has been ripped off from its source is not just dismissed as a few leaves that fell off of a tree. It becomes something very precious. We know what happened to all forms of life. Human, animal and plant life had all been killed. A person who has seen total destruction gains a new appreciation for all forms of life.

As such, Noach viewed the olive branch as if it had been "killed" by the dove, ripping it off the tree.

Miracles Can Happen Slowly

Rav Shimon Schwab (in his sefer) makes the following assumption. If water covered the entire earth such that the highest mountains were totally submerged, we should expect that the time it would take for the water to recede or evaporate until the land became dry again would be far longer than the several week period that the Torah outlines in the narration in Parshas Noach [Bereishis 8:6-14].

By the rules of physics and nature, the length of time that it should take for that much water to recede should have been years, rather than days or weeks. The whole world was flooded and saturated with water. The only way the waters could have receded and the earth dried out in the short period described by the Torah is through a miracle.

But if we come to the conclusion that the removal of those many hundreds of millions of gallons of water happened miraculously, then why was it necessary for the miracle to "take so long"? Why did Noach need to send out the raven and the dove? Why did he need to wait one week then another week? Why was it necessary to stay in the Ark for so many more days after the dove did not fly back?

When G-d decided that the Flood should cease and the land should become dry, why did the flood not then cease and the land become dry instantaneously? If G-d is making a miracle anyhow, why didn't He make it a little more dramatic and spare Noach the waiting time?

Rav Schwab suggests that the Torah is teaching that it is often necessary to be patient when waiting for G-d's salvation in life. It is very difficult for modern day man to adjust to this idea. For us, everything must be instantaneous. When we want to warm something up, we stick it in the microwave oven for 25 seconds. When we want a hot cup of coffee, we go to the sink and turn on the "instant hot". Everything that we have today comes without waiting. "You want to see a document?" "Fax it or e-mail it." As a last resort, send it 'Overnight express.'

G-d does not work like that. The salvation may be here already. G-d may have already decided to end the Flood. But the relief might not happen right away.

The Talmud states [Berachos 55a] that one who prays to G-d and then investigates to see whether his prayers have been immediately answered is destined to be disappointed (bah l'yedei k'ev lev).

A person may pray that he find a job or that he be accepted into a certain school. Then, he may run to the mail box to see if the acceptance letter arrived.

A person may have a disease or an illness. He may pray for a recovery. He may go to the doctor and receive treatment for his condition. He may be convinced that the treatment will cure him now.

It does not happen like that. We need an "And he waited seven more days..." and also "And he waited seven more days..." [Bereishis 8:10,12]. Sometimes patience is necessary. It does not happen instantly.

At the end of Parshas Shemos, Moshe complained to G-d "Why have you made matters worse for this nation? Why have you sent me? From the time that I came to Pharoah, he has been worse to this nation and you have not yet saved your people." [Shemos 5:22-23].

Moshe complained that the magic words 'Let my people go' did not work. Not only did Pharoah not let them go, it aggravated him and made matters worse for the people.

G-d responded to Moshe, "NOW you will see what I will do to Pharoah and he will send out My

people" [Shemos 6:1].

The Gemarah interprets "Now you will see what I will do to Pharoah, but you will not see what I will do to the 31 Kings when Israel enters the Land of Canaan" [Sanhedrin 111a]. This was an aspect of Moshe's punishment of not being permitted to enter Eretz Yisroel - as a result of not having patience and for "second guessing," as it were, the instructions of G-d.

What is the "measure for measure" justice of this punishment? It took 14 years to settle the Land of Israel. There were 7 years of conquest and 7 years of division. It did not come instantly. Moshe Rabbeinu - who, of course, because of his greatness he was held to a higher standard -- demanded something of G-d which was not in accordance with the way G-d conducts Himself. G-d does not provide instant results. It takes time. This is the lesson of "Noach waited." He did not say "the rains stopped, let us leave the Ark." Salvation takes time, it does not happen instantly.

Sometimes we leave the Yomim Noraim [High Holidays] and we expect instant changes from G-d. We prayed intently. This is a new year. There has been new judgment. All my problems should be solved now. We expect our troubles to have all dissipated by the day after Yom Kippur. "I davened well. I felt that You answered me. Nu?"

Noach had to wait. Noach had to anticipate. The flood was over, but it took time. This is how G-d works. Salvation does not always happen instantaneously. This is a lesson that modern day man needs to learn.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Noach are provided below:

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- Tape # 069 - Ma'ariv and Mitzvos in the Land of Midnight Sun
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