

RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS NOACH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Noach

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 653, The Temple Mount in Halacha and Habayis. Good Shabbos!

Experiencing 3 Worlds

In the opening pasuk [verse] of our parsha, the name Noach is mentioned three times: "These are the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d." [Bereishis 6:9]. The Medrash Tanchuma takes note of this strange sentence structure and comments that the pasuk alludes to the fact that Noach is an individual who had the distinction of seeing three different worlds: He saw the world when it was settled; he saw the world when it was destroyed; and he saw the world when it was settled once again.

Rav Simcha Wasserman expressed the thought that anyone who lived in Europe before the Holocaust, who lived through the Holocaust, and then merited to come out of the Holocaust and settle either in the United States or in the Land of Israel may also say about himself that he saw three worlds: He saw a settled world, a world in destruction, and a world once again settled.

To have seen Europe in its final days of Jewish glory - the great Yeshivos, the great Jewish communities that existed there - this was to see a "settled world". To have witnessed what Rav Simcha witnessed, including the death of his father, Rav Elchonon Wasserman (may Hashem revenge his blood) at the hands of the Nazis and to have seen the desolation and destruction that he witnessed was to have seen a world in destruction. To have then come to the United States and settle in Los Angeles California and try to build Torah there and to have then resettled in Eretz Yisrael and have established a Yeshiva there too - he saw a world resettled once again.

Rav Simcha Wasserman commented that he learned in the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe. Telshe was in Lithuania, which is very far North. In the summer the days are extremely long and the nights are extremely short. He remembers walking in the city of Telshe in the summer time and he looked to

the North and saw a sky that was pitch black and full of stars. As he looked to the southwest he saw a beautiful red sky in which the sun was just beginning to set. As he looked to the East he could already see the rays of light before the moments of dawn. On one day, in one moment, he saw a sunset, he saw pitch darkness, and he saw the beginning of another sunrise. This memory became the metaphor for him of what he witnessed later in his life. He witnessed the sun setting on the European Jewish community; he witnessed its darkest night; and he witnessed the new sunrise that occurred after the war. This thought does not only apply to Rav Simcha Wasserman, but to all Jews whose lives spanned World War II.

Rav Simcha Wasserman continued his comments by quoting a pasuk at the end of Parshas Noach: "And Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself (vaYachel Noach) and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk..." [Bereishis 9:20-21]. The Sages criticize Noach for planting a vineyard as his first act of planting after the Flood. "He should have involved himself in other types of planting." This act made him somewhat pedestrian (vaYachel comes from the same root as chullin = mundane).

Rav Simcha Wasserman commented, what do you want from this fellow? The man literally just saw the destruction of the world! He came out of the Ark to find a totally desolate world. It is understandable in those circumstances that a person should be depressed. It is also understandable that a person would want to deal with his depression. In those days, the way one dealt with depression was "Give wine to those bitter of spirit" [Mishlei 31:6]

The answer is that the Torah does not say that Noach became a wicked person. He did not do something bad or evil. It was understandable. But the Torah comments that he made himself "chullin" [mundane, pedestrian]. If a person has seen an entire world destroyed and he merits to be among the very few who are saved, there is no time for depression or to worry about one's own emotions. Such a person has a job to do. He must rebuild, pick up, and start over.

There are some situations in life where a person does not have the luxury to think about himself. In such circumstances a person cannot wallow in his sadness and depression. The person must deal with it: If the Almighty picked me and saved me from among all those who did not make it, it must be because the Almighty wants me to do something with my life.

Such was the philosophy of Rav Simcha Wasserman. He saw his father and his father's entire Yeshiva in Baronovich destroyed, but he came out of the Holocaust, dusted himself off so to speak and became a disseminator of Torah in his own right. He not only preached the above thought, but he practiced what he preached. It is because of the amazing strength of character of individuals like himself and like the Roshei Yeshiva and the Chassidic leaders who were saved and came over to America and started over, rather than wallowing in their depression that we now are the recipients of their contributions and can enjoy the fruits of a spiritual world that is once again blossoming.

Noach Had Children Late In Life

The pasuk at the end of Parshas Bereishis [5:32] says: "And Noach was 500 years old and he gave birth to Shem, Cham, and Yafes". Rashi asks why others of Noach's generation gave birth to children at the age of 100 on average while Noach did not have any children until much later in life. Rashi answers that G-d did Noach a favor, so to speak. If he had children at a normal age and they turned out to be wicked, G-d would have had to kill them out with the rest of their generation. If, on the other hand, they were righteous, then by the time of the Flood they in turn would have already had several generations of descendants and Noach would need to build several Arks to house all his descendants. Therefore, Noach's children were born close in time to the Flood, such that Noach's oldest son was not yet a "bar onshin" [at the age when he would be subject to Heavenly punishment] when the decree concerning the Flood was issued.

Let us put ourselves in Noach's shoes for a minute. Noach was the greatest Tzadik in his generation. Everyone else was having children and grandchildren. Noach was infertile and childless. Where is there justice in this world? Noach must have had such thoughts for 400 years! He must have been asking himself "What does G-d have against me? What does he want from me? Why is he doing this to me? I am the most righteous person of my generation!"

The answer is that the Almighty has His calculations. He knew that there would be a Flood and everyone would be destroyed. He knew that it was best for Noach that he not have children for those 400 years. So the Almighty does Noach a favor and makes him infertile.

Our own perceived misfortunes are one of the hardest things for any of us to understand. We are limited by time and space and can only see what is happening in front of our eyes. There are times when we can't believe the things that happen to us and we perceive them as the greatest punishment. We must have this bedrock faith, which is so much easier to preach than to integrate into our psyche. This is the true Jewish outlook on life. If we could all know what the Almighty has in mind for us, we would understand that G-d is not doing us a disservice, but He is doing us the greatest favor!

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:

- Tape # 027 - The Abortion Controversy
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- Tape # 165 - Euthanasia
- Tape # 211 - Animal Experimentation
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