

WHAT WAS NOACH'S GREATEST LEGACY?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Noach

What Was Noach's Greatest Legacy?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: # 741, Your Wife's Medical Bills: Who Pays? Good Shabbos!

The sequence of expression in the opening pasukim [verses] of our parsha [Bereshis 6:9-10] is noteworthy. The Torah begins "And these are the offspring of Noach" (Eleh toldos Noach), which would lead us to expect that we will be immediately told the names of Noach's children. However, the Torah first says, "Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations". Only after that does the Torah continue, "Noach had begotten three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafes." It seems that the description of Noach's righteousness is out of place in the narrative. Rashi comments on this unusual sequence and says this teaches that the main offspring (i.e. creations) of righteous people are their good deeds. The true descendants of a Tzadik are not the physical children he leaves behind, but his acts of kindness.

This is truly an amazing statement. Each of us is here because of Noach. What is the greatest legacy that Noach left the world? I would say that the answer is simple: humanity! The fact that there are people in this world is the greatest legacy that Noach could leave. Yet Chazal explain that the pasuk is teaching us that this is not true. Noach's greatest legacy (as is the case with all Tzadikim) is his good deeds! We are commanded to have children but children are also human beings. They are not eternal. They will die and ultimately leave this world. However, there is something we can do in this world that is eternal and never ceases to exist, namely our good deeds! This is an amazing statement.

The Medrash says that the wife of Noach was Naamah, a descendant of Kayin. We are told about some of Cain's other descendants [Bereshis 4:20-22]. One was Yaval, who founded the cattle and shepherd industry, which has been around for thousands of years. Another was Yuval. He was the first musician. A third descendant, Tuval Kayin, was the first metalworker. He fashioned metal into swords. All of these individuals died. The flood wiped out their descendants and their legacies. Naamah, on the other hand, is the only descendant of Kayin to survive. Why did she survive? Chazal

say that she was called Na'amah because her actions were "Naim u'neimim" -- they were pleasant and brought pleasure to others.

The point is that accomplishments, even creating major industries, music, and so forth are all fine and good but they are not eternal. They do not last forever. The only thing in this world that is truly eternal is spirituality and good deeds. This is the point of the aforementioned teaching of our Sages: The major offspring of the righteous is their good deeds.

The Rainbow's Reminder Is For The Sake of Mankind

After the flood, the pasuk says, "I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth... And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant between G-d and every living being, among all flesh that is on earth." [Bereshis 9:13-16]. The Torah herein states that after the flood, G-d made a promise that He would never again destroy the world through a flood. Apparently, the Almighty needed a reminder that He made such a promise. Therefore, He created the phenomenon of a rainbow. Whenever He gets very angry at the world and is tempted to destroy it again with another flood, He has -- as it were -- this "string around His finger". He looks at the rainbow and reminds Himself of His promise.

This simple reading of the pasukim is both patently ridiculous and heretical. G-d does not need reminders or strings around His finger, as it were. What is the true meaning of these pasukim?

Rashi and the Seforno explain what this really means. The Almighty is doing the world a tremendous favor. He uses the rainbow to send a message to humanity that He is once again very angry at the world. The Almighty does not need a rainbow in the sky as a reminder. We need a reminder. We look at the rainbow and we are supposed to take note that it is a time of Anger before the Almighty. At such times, we should think that the Almighty is so angry at the world that were it not for His Promise, He would again destroy the world. Therefore, we should hasten to repent and do Teshuva.

The Seforno writes that when the righteous see the rainbow and are therefore motivated to pray and repent, they stand in the breach so that they may appease the Almighty's Anger and temptation to destroy humanity.

The Ramban cites a passage from Tractate Chagiga [16a] that one should not stare at a rainbow and one who does so, it is fitting that he not have come into this world. What is the meaning of this Gemara? The rainbow is a beautiful thing. What is wrong with looking at it? In the "Confession of Rav Amram Gaon" one of the items for which we "confess our sins" on Yom Kippur is that "we stared at a rainbow". What is the problem with looking at a rainbow?

Rav Simcha Zissel - in his writings - says a very interesting thing. When we see a rainbow, our reaction is "beautiful". We admire the colors, the shape, the impact, and so forth. We admire the rainbow and are inspired by it.

Consider the audacity of this typical reaction. G-d is Angry. He is placing a rainbow in the sky as a message to us to get serious, to repent, and beseech His Mercy. What is our reaction? "Beautiful!" This is the great chutzpah of staring admiringly at a rainbow.

Rav Simcha Zissel compares the situation to a father who was terribly angry with his child and who raised his hand to strike him. The father is livid and his expression manifests extreme dissatisfaction to his child. The kid looks up and is amused or entertained by his father's facial expression. Such a reaction will anger the father even more. That is the situation with our reaction of admiration and pleasure at the rainbow's beauty.

Rav Simcha Zissel takes issue with a comment of the Mishneh Berura who quotes in the name of Chayei Adam that one who sees a rainbow should not tell this to his friend. Rav Simcha Zissel says he does not understand the logic in this. If one sees a rainbow, he argues, that should inspire us to repent and to get others to repent as well. On the contrary, one should alert as many people as possible to the presence of the rainbow so that they too will be able to take proper spiritual action.

The Gemara [Brachos 59a] says that the purpose of thunder is to put the fear of G-d into people's hearts. When the Chofetz Chaim used to hear thunder, besides making the appropriate blessing, he used to say, "What does Father want?"

A rainbow should generate an even more dramatic action on our part. In our lifetime, we have seen many more dramatic "klaps" in terms of historical occurrences than both thunder and rainbows put together. Under these circumstances, it is our responsibility to emulate the Chofetz Chaim and say: "What does Father want from us?"

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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