

CERTAIN THINGS NOACH DID NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Noach

Certain Things Noach Did Not Have To Worry About

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD# 873, Stem Cell Research. Good Shabbos!

There appears to be an apparent contradiction in the narrative of the animals' entry into the Teyva [Ark]. In one place, it appears that they (miraculously) came on their own, in other pasukim [verses], it appears that they did not come on their own but rather Noach had to go catch them himself.

The Ramban explains that the pairs of animals that came "two by two" all approached the Teyva on their own. It was the species of kosher animals for which Noach was told to bring 7 pairs - so that he would have "extra" animals with which to offer sacrifices after the flood - that he needed to fetch on his own. The Ramban explains that those animals, which came to be saved to preserve their species for future generations, were given a Heavenly instinct of self-preservation that caused them to gravitate to the Teyva on their own. However, the animals, which would eventually be sacrificed as burnt offerings, were not given such an instinct as G-d would not place within an animal an instinct, which would lead to its future destruction. Therefore, their arrival on the Teyva was something, which required manual intervention on Noach's part.

The sefer Im Levovi Asicha explains this distinction based on an incident, which happened with Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav).

Shortly after the State of Israel was established, in the early 1950s, there was a great controversy whether to allow religious girls to do national service (Sheirut Le'umi) in lieu of military service in the army. The leading Rabbis from the Yeshiva world were concerned about the potential for spiritual corruption in a Sheirut Le'umi structure and they took the position that under no circumstances was this to be permitted. David Ben Gurion, the Prime Minister of Israel, threatened to rescind the draft deferment given to male Yeshiva students if the Roshei Yeshiva would not cooperate with him in allowing girls to do national service.

The Roshei Yeshiva refused to budge and basically called Ben Gurion's bluff regarding his threat to close down the Yeshivos if he was not allowed to draft the girls into Sheirut Le'umi. The Brisker Rav said at that time: We have one responsibility and one responsibility only and that is to keep the Halacha. 'But what is going to be with Torah?' What is going to be with Klal Yisrael if the Yeshivos are shut down and there will not be any Yeshiva bochrim learning Torah? That is G-d's problem, not our problem. G-d promised us that the Torah will not be forgotten from the midst of our children [Devorim 31:21]. We can rely on G-d to fulfill his problem. We must focus on keeping the Halacha (which in that context, he felt was to refuse to permit the girls to do national service) and not attempt to compromise it out of strategic considerations "what is going to be with Torah?"

In this vein, the Sefer Im Levovi Asicha explains the Ramban's distinction. The "two by two" who came to preserve G-d's plan for the world that there should always be elephants and rhinoceroses and hippopotamuses -- that was G-d's issue to worry about and Noach did not need to get involved. However, if Noach wanted animals for his own voluntary sacrifices - that was something he needed to arrange on his own. But Noach does not need to worry about what is going to be with creation.

It Wasn't True Then and It Is Not True Now

I would like to share the following article from January 6, 2005, after the great Indian Ocean tsunami of December, 2004. Approximately 1900 Swedish people who were vacationing in the affected area vanished in the tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean that winter.

What does this have to do with Parshas Noach?

The building of the Tower of Bavel was an attempt by the people there to inoculate themselves from any type of disaster. "We are going to build this tower that will reach the heaven and this will protect us from any future flood. The Almighty will never again be able to destroy us! We don't have to worry about G-d anymore."

The article says, "In Sweden, for decades, this Scandinavian nation has grown in prosperity and peace, immunized by its policy of political neutrality. Like other Europeans, its people learned to abandon the chill of traditional winters for tropical lands brought closer by easy connections of global tourism. But cheap charter flight air fares do not include the cradle to grave security that Scandinavians have woven around themselves and neutrality cannot guard against natural disaster...

The implication of this article is that the people of Sweden said, "We are going to protect ourselves. We are going to immunize ourselves from all the world's troubles. We are going to remain neutral so we are not going to have wars. We are going to provide socialism from cradle to grave. We are going to take care of you from the minute you are born until the minute you die. We are going to build ourselves a tower that reaches to heaven and protect ourselves from all the ravages that plague the world.

So what do they do? They get on a plane and go from cold Sweden in the middle of December to Thailand. They are living it up. They think they are safe. No. Someone can go to the other side of the world and still be affected. It is always something. Today, Ebola reminds us that there are some things, which we cannot control. What can we do about Ebola? The article concludes "This will erode our confidence in our ability to be safe."

Since the Tower of Babel, people have been thinking "We can protect ourselves; we can be safe; we do not need to depend on the Almighty." It was not true then and it is not true now. The only protection that human beings can ever count on is the protection of the Ribono shel Olam.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah 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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