



Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Noach

What was the point of the flood?

The entire incident of the Flood seems perplexing. Humanity had started populating the world, and initially fulfilled Gods mission, until suddenly, things came to a bottleneck, and society degenerated to a point where God decided to “start over” from Noach. But why?

The Malbim observes that the Torah writes:

צא, מן-הַתֵּבָה-אִתָּהּ... כָּל-הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-אִתְּךָ מִכָּל-בֶּשֶׂר, בְּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הַרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ-הוּצֵא (הִיֹצֵא) אִתְּךָ; וְשָׂרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ, וּפְרוּ וּרְבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ –

Leave the Ark – you... and every living creature with you. Every creature, bird, animal and insect that creeps on the earth, should leave with you, and they will multiply and infest the earth. (8:16-17)

Malbim explains that the salvation of life on earth was through Noach, and the psukim say as much, by emphasising – כָּל-הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-אִתְּךָ he was the instrument through which they were saved, because they were “with him”.

The Malbim explains the undercurrent in the sequence of events that led to the Flood, and what it repaired. When Adam was created, he had the potential of all Creation within him. Every possible characteristic and outcome was seeded within him, including those of animals. The way he behaved; nature reacted. We see this somewhat today, to a small degree, in how pets reflect characteristics of their owners.

The generation of the Flood squandered and destroyed their potential to be good, and had no positive characteristics. Nature reacted accordingly, and animals became evil too, with all species mingling with others, to a point where the Torah (6:12) writes כִּי-הִשְׁחִית כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר – עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֶת-דְּרָכָו, that every living creature had lost its way.

Noach reclaimed decency, and “humanity” – in the true sense of the word, by being honest and good. He reclaimed and preserved the potential to be good. He was the sole being that had not corrupted itself, and as such existence was perpetuated exclusively for his sake. This is why he was chosen of all men – existence owed itself to him.

צא, מן-הַתֵּבָה-אִתָּהּ... כָּל-הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-אִתְּךָ מִכָּל-בֶּשֶׂר, בְּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הַרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ-הוּצֵא (הִיֹצֵא) אִתְּךָ; וְשָׂרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ, וּפְרוּ וּרְבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ –

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that creeps on the earth, should leave with you, and they will multiply and infest the earth. (8:16-17)

Nature owed Noah a debt – it was preserved – אֶתְךָ through him. In the beginning of the very next chapter, God permits man to eat meat for the very first time – as a direct result of this.

The Difference of Kosher

When Hashem informs Noah of the impending flood, a distinction is made for the first time in the Torah between kosher, טהור animals and non-kosher, טמא animals.

At the time, this was not practical dietary information – man was not yet permitted to consume meat; its criticality to the kosher diet was not revealed until Sinai. Yet there was still a certain relevance to the people of the time – they were only allowed to bring sacrificial offerings from kosher animals.

Noah is informed how to populate the ark: “of every pure animal you shall take” (7:2); whereas concerning the non-kosher animals he is told “they will come to you” (6:20). The kosher ones needed to be sought out. Why?

The word טהור is related to the word צהור meaning transparent, which describes allowing for light to pass through something. Consequently, purity has the connotations of being conducive and receptive.

The dietary laws for which Jews are obligated to keep are not intended to preserve bodily health. After all, Jews have a responsibility to ensure that non-Jewish residents living in Israel who keep the law (גר תושב) are taken care of, and it is completely permitted to do so using non-kosher products.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that animals are “pure” if they are receptive to human influence; they are submissive to man without requiring to be tamed; they serve his purposes; and instinct and passion do not overwhelmingly determine their behaviour. Animals which are “impure” have that status because they are unable to be controlled, and can only be subdued, if at all, through violence.

The same applies when animals are to be used for sacrifices. The main function of a sacrifice is to express complete dedication to God. Through its blood we symbolically devote our own lifeblood to God’s will. Therefore only animals which closely align to man’s nature and disposition are suitable for a sacrifice. The characteristics of the kosher animals are what Jews should aspire to have within them – a controlled instinct.

Consequently, it is understandable why Noah was commanded to actively seek out the pure animals, while the impure animals would come to him.

The pure animals by their very nature are meant to inform mankind of his mission to control what comes naturally, and to put such a lesson into practice, it must be sought out and cultivated.

Literally food for thought.

Optimum Kindness

Regarding the extent of the severity of the flood, we are told:

וימח את כל היקום אשר על פני האדמה מאדם עד בהמה עד רמש ועד עוף השמים וימחו מן הארץ
 וישאר אך נח ואשר אתו בתבה –

Hashem blotted out all existence on the face of the Earth – from man, to animals, to creeping things, to the birds of the skies; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah survived, and those with him in the Ark.” (7:23)

The Midrash that teaches that Noah was once late to feed a lion, and it bit him in the leg. The Midrash extrapolates this from this verse, from the word – ”אך” “only,” which implies a limitation – an exception. The “limitation” was Noah himself, that he was more limited; a part of him was missing – having been bitten off by the lion.

What is the function and purpose of this teaching?

The Gemara in Bava Metzia states that R’ Chanina and R’ Chiya had a dispute, R’ Chanina said to R’ Chiya; “If the Torah were to be forgotten in Israel, I would restore it using my argumentative ability.”

R’ Chiya would reply to R’ Chanina: “I’ve already made sure that Torah should not be forgotten in Israel. I planted flax and made nets from it, trapped deers with the nets. I fed their meat to orphans, and prepared scrolls from their skins, upon which I wrote the five books of Torah. Then I went to a town which contained no teachers and taught each of the five books to five children, and the six orders of the Talmud to six children. And I instructed them: ‘Until I return, teach each other the Torah and the Mishna;’ and thus I preserved the Torah from being forgotten in Israel.”

Was his key point not just that he wrote it and taught it? Then why not just buy some parchment ready-made? Why bother doing, and saying, the entire manufacturing process to obtain parchment?

The Maharsha explains that in commencing all things, one must be sure that its foundations are solid. Thus, R’ Chiya intended to ensure that the continuation of Torah would spread from a solid base. There was no room for financial impropriety leading to the emergence of the parchment in the marketplace; they needed to be entrenched in holiness from the outset. He could only guarantee this if it emerged from directly under his own supervision.

However, this itself requires extra clarification. Why was all this necessary? The Mishna in Avos 1:2 teaches: “Shimon HaTzaddik used to say: ‘The world stands on three things: On Torah, on Prayer, and on Acts of Kindness’”. Rabbeinu Yona explains that “the world stands” on these three things means that these are the reason and purpose of creation; creation exists for the performance of these.

It is evident then, that if one of these three things were removed from the equation, creation would have no reason for this world to exist. To this end, R’ Chaim of Volozhin writes regarding the study of Torah, that if not a single Jew across the globe were to learn for even one second, the entire universe would cease to be.

It is for this reason that R’ Chiya needed to take extreme measures to ensure the future of Torah learning. One of the three supports of the world certainly requires impeccable establishment.

With this insight, we can explain the Midrash’s story of Noah being attacked.

The Midrash teaches that until the Torah was given and the Mishkan built, Torah and Prayer were not practiced; the sole foundation the world stood on was Acts of Kindness. The Gemara in Sanhedrin explains that although the generation of the flood was guilty with all sorts of activity, it was only due to their – ”חמס“corruption, theft and extortion – that their fate was sealed. Because the world at that point stood only – or was created only – for the perpetuation of kindness. By shirking their responsibilities, even going to the opposite extreme, robbing and cheating each other, they doomed themselves. Without standing up for the purpose of the world, they retained no purpose in existence.

Noah and his family had a very particular job to accomplish in the Ark. Rashi suggests another interpretation of the word : ”אך“ that Noah was himself, but less so. This means that he started out eager and excited, but grew weary, sighing and groaning about the burden of his duty to care for the animals. Chazal teach that for all twelve months in the Ark, Noah and his sons did not sleep, for there were always more animals to feed. (This poses a slight difficulty – if he was always at work, he could never be “late” per se.) But this certainly seems odd – if Hashem found Noah to be righteous among his generation – at least enough to warrant his survival – why trouble him for the duration of the flood to such an extent that he was overworked? Why not simply allow him to enjoy the cruise?

As the Midrash said; at that time there was but one purpose to the world: Acts of Kindness. That generation had destroyed their foundations, resulting in their annihilation. It is not a stretch then, to say that Noah’s “job” was to rectify and restore Kindness; to rebalance the world on its single, shaky leg. He could not sit back and enjoy the cruise; he had work to do!

In rebalancing the world with Noah, Kindness required that he not just feed one animal from time to time, but to go to great lengths – to the extent of not sleeping for an entire

year – to feed all animals, all the time. All this was necessary to counter the severity of the destruction to the pillar of Kindness caused by his generation. This is congruent to the story of R' Chiya who also exhausted great efforts in establishing the pillar of Torah.

So the Midrash tells us; at one point Noah slacked, or came late. This was a disaster – given the magnitude of his task. He was the one chosen to perpetuate Kindness, and his performance needed to be perfect – being late was not an option. The lion delivered this message to Noah by biting him.

To balance the world, imperfections were intolerable and could not be afforded. It is implied that the lion bit Noah in the leg, as we are told that he left the Ark limping – and the symbolism is clear; in reestablishing the “leg” of the world there must not be any fault. R' Shlomo Farhi notes how he was not selected for his kindness, but because he was תמים –which, in terms of sacrifices, means “unblemished”. His claim to fame was that there was nothing “wrong” with him. But the world needed something “right”; “nothing wrong” wouldn't do!

In causing Noah to limp, he was reminded of just how delicate his world was, standing on it's one “leg,” it's one purpose – Kindness. It may only be one “leg” but it would be enough to give life to the world. The world needed Noah's Kindness on the Ark to be done to perfection. The lion bite was a rectification for his infraction, however slight.

But the world got its leg to stand on, a purpose, through his – טוֹן Kindness.

Benefiting from Miracles

R' Chaim Brisker wonders how the jug of oil the Hasmoneans found in the Chanukah story was suitable for use beyond the first day. It wasn't natural olive oil after the first day – it was the product of miracle, and therefore not organic – and the commandment to light the Menorah was with natural olive oil specifically. It might have had the physical and chemical properties of olive oil, but the substance had not come from an olive!

What was the point of using it after the first day?

The Gemara in Taanis 24 states that one ought not benefit from a miracle.

Examples of this may be found in the stories of rabbis of old in Europe who didn't have food, and when circumstance or luck provided something for them to eat, the Rabbi would refuse it on the grounds that it would detract from his Olam Habah.

At the construction of the Mishkan, in Shemos 35:27, the Torah describes how the princes, , אֲשֶׁר בְּאֵזְרֵי הַיָּדָיִם brought oil and spices after the nation donated resources, but אֲשֶׁר בְּאֵזְרֵי הַיָּדָיִם is spelled without the letter י. Rashi explains the oversight to mean that their intentions were good, but their actions were deficient, in that they underestimated the will of the Jewish people to donate materials for the construction of the Mishkan, and so their name was shortened here to teach us to act wholeheartedly.

R' Yonasan ben Uziel explains differently, reading Nesi'im as Neshaim, Aramaic for clouds. It was not the Nesi'im who provided the materials, but rather, clouds came to the princes with stones, oil and spices – from the sky!

R' Chaim Zevin asks R' Chaim Brisker's question; how could the princes use these for the Mishkan? They might have physically been olive oil/stones/spices, but again, they were unnatural. And then there is the prohibition of benefiting from miracles.

This can be answered by understanding how Noach left the Ark.

וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב, וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ זֵית טָרֶף בְּפִיהָ –
 The bird came back in the evening with an olive branch in its mouth. (8:11)

The Ramban explains that the olive branch was from Gan Eden – clearly, it is an actual place with actual things within it.

Knowing this, R' Tzvi Pesach Franck concludes that we can differentiate between certain kinds of miracles. The cases under discussion were not Yesh Me'ayin – something from nothing. These were Yesh MeYesh, manipulations of something that was somewhere else – specifically, in Heaven! They were then moved to Earth. They were thus completely permissible, much like the Manna, which was not a new “thing”, rather, it is what the angels grind to make their bread according to the Gemara in Yoma. Nothing new was created, which was what the prohibition in Taanis was referring to. That is to say that the miracle was not their creation, which one would be forbidden to benefit from according to Taanis 24, but rather, their miraculous manipulation to be somewhere else at the appropriate time.

This can be proven from when Yakov brings a feast to his father, Yitzchak:

וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲגִשָּׁה לִי וְאֶכְלָה מִצֵּיד בְּנֵי-לְמַעַן תְּבָרְכֵךְ, נַפְשִׁי; וַיִּגֹּשׁ-לוֹ, וַיֵּי אָכַל, וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן, וַיִּשְׁתֶּה” –
 “And he said: ‘Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, that my soul may bless thee.’ And he brought it near to him, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank.”

At no point did his mother prepare wine, and R' Yonason ben Uziel again points out the previous idea of things existing in Heaven and says that an angel brought wine made from grapes that were in heaven since Creation.

There is a saying; “To bake an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the Universe,” – this is the same idea. The objects under discussion were not from scratch at all.

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