

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת נח

אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו את האלקים התהלך נח
“These are the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with Hashem” (6:9)

R' Nissan Alpert comments that Noach's name is mentioned three times in the first posuk of this week's parsha. This represents three aspects in which Noach excelled: bein adam lachaveiro (interpersonal dealings), bein adam lamakom (dealings with Hashem), bein adam l'atzmo (dealings with himself). There is a Gemara in Bava Kama 30a and a Maharsha there that also stress the importance of these three aspects of a person's behavior. The Gemara records three opinions regarding what parts of Torah a person should focus on being good at in order to become pious. Some say to focus on the laws of damages, some say the laws of ethics (Avos) and some say the laws of brachos. That a person who wants to be pious should fulfill nezikin, some say avos and some say brachos. The Maharsha says that through the laws of damages, one improves his behavior toward fellow men. By following the advice in Pirkei Avos, he improves his character traits and his behavior toward himself. Finally, by following the laws of brachos properly, he improves his relationship with Hashem. Thus, through these laws one can improve his overall character.

כי לימים עוד שבעה אנכי ממטיר על הארץ ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה ומחיתי את כל היקום אשר עשיתי מעל פני האדמה
“For in another seven days' time I will send rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out all existence that I have made from upon the face of the earth” (7:4)

What was the purpose of this seven-day waiting period? Rashi, citing the Gemara, explains that "these are the seven days of mourning for the righteous Mesushelach, for Hashem spared his dignity and delayed the punishments. Go and calculate the years of Mesushelach and you will find that they end in the six hundredth year of the life of Noach." As long as Mesushelach was alive, his righteousness protected his generation from harm. Only after he died and the days of mourning were completed could Hashem bring the flood upon the world. R' Michel Berenbaum says that it is not just that tzadikim protect the generation from punishment. As long as a tzadik is alive, there is someone around who can inspire the people to do teshuva and redirect them to the path of Hashem. His presence is a source of great inspiration for them. When the tzadik is taken away, there is no longer any hope that the people will repent. This is why Hashem did not bring the flood until after Mesushelach had passed away.

מן הבהמה הטהורה ומן הבהמה אשר איננה טהרה ומן העוף וכל אשר רמש על האדמה
“Of the clean animal, of the animal that is not clean, of the birds, and of each thing

that creeps upon the ground” (7:8)

The Torah does not describe the non-kosher animals as "tamei" but rather as "not tahor." Why is this so? The Gemara in Pesachim 3a explains that there is an important lesson that the Torah is trying to teach us: "One should not let an inappropriate word come out of his mouth for we see that the Torah used eight extra letters rather than use the word 'tamei.'" This is an especially important messages for us today, when the society around us places very little value in the words that one chooses and when the standards of acceptable speech have been considerably lowered. We must always remember not to allow secular mores to influence us and to use the Torah as the guide for our behavior.

את קשתי נתתי בענן והיתה לאות ברית ביני ובין הארץ “I have set My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (9:13)

The Gemara in Berachos 59a teaches that one who sees a rainbow is obligated to recite the following blessing: ברוך זוכר הברית ונאמן בבריתו וקיים במאמרו, "Blessed are You, Hashem... Who remembers the covenant, is trustworthy in His covenant and fulfills His word." What is added by saying that Hashem fulfills His word if one says that He is trustworthy in His covenant? The Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 229:1) says that His word refers to the command of Hashem which created the rainbow during the six days of creation. One may have thought that the rainbow was a new creation that was brought into existence after the flood. Through the text of the blessing we remember that the rainbow was actually created at the beginning of the world's existence but was hidden away until after the flood. The Mishna Berura (229:4) says that Hashem would keep his word even without a sign of covenant. Once Hashem said that He would never again bring such a large-scale deluge as punishment for the world, it would have sufficed. However, He went out of His way to make a covenant with mankind. Therefore, we mention both in the blessing.

The halacha states that one should not stare at a rainbow too long. A person who sees a rainbow should look at it just long enough to make a beracha, but not longer. The Aruch HaShulchan (ibid. 2) explains that the posuk in Yechezkel compares the appearance of Hashem's glory to the appearance of a rainbow. Therefore, to stare at a rainbow is similar to staring at the glory of Hashem.

The rainbow is not necessarily a good sign. Its appearance signifies that Hashem has to recall his covenant not to destroy the world again to prevent punishment from happening. Thus, its appearance would seem to signify that people are not acting as they should. Based on this, the Chayei Adam (63:4) writes that one should not tell his friend if he sees a rainbow because it is like spreading bad news.

מן הארץ ההוא יצא אשור ויבן את נינוה ואת רחבת עיר ואת כלח “From that land Ashur went forth and build Nineveh, Rechovos Ir and Kalach” (10:11)

Rashi explains that Nimrod would speak to people and entice them to join him in his rebellion against Hashem. He succeeded in converting a large number of people over to his side. The posuk then mentions Ashur, who left Nimrod's jurisdiction because he saw

that his children had fallen prey to Nimrod's persuasion. Why is it necessary for the Torah to recount this story. The Chofetz Chaim writes that the Torah tells us about evildoers of the very early years of world history to teach us that the methods that were used to rebel against Hashem were the same then as they are now. There were the Nefilim, who wanted to use their physical strength to rebel against Hashem, the people who tried to build the Tower of Bavel, who aimed to rebel against Hashem with their minds, and Nimrod, who used his speech to rebel against Hashem and to convince others to join him. The Torah tells this to us because there will be more Nimrods in the future. This story will repeat itself in history and we should be prepared for it. When this happens, people tend to go with the flow and follow the crowd, even if it means rebelling against Hashem. However, the Torah tells us that there was an Ashur who dissented from the widely held beliefs and was successful in avoiding doing evil just because everyone else was doing it. We should know that we too can hold out for what we know to be the truth, just as Ashur did many centuries ago. It is interesting to note that Ashur built the city of Nineveh as his new home. Perhaps these events that surrounded the origins of Nineveh is what helped the people of that city discover the power of repentance many years later in the time of Yonah. If one starts something with good intentions, Hashem provides a blessing that it should continue. One should never be afraid to do something that is right, even if everyone else is doing something different.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann

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