

Noach: Transforming Justice Into Mercy

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson
From the Sichos in English Collection

In commenting on the verse¹ “G-d (*Elokim*) remembered Noach....”, *Rashi* notes: “This Name (*Elokim*) is the Name of the Attribute of Justice. It was transformed to Mercy through the prayers of the righteous.”

Why did this remembrance have to come from the Attribute of Justice and be transformed into Mercy? Why could it not have *originated* from G-d's Attribute of Mercy?

Later in the Torah portion of *Noach*, the verse goes on to state,² “G-d smelled the pleasing fragrance, and said to Himself: ‘Never again will I curse the soil because of man.....’ ”

The *Midrash* notes³ that the “pleasing fragrance” alludes³ to the “fragrance of our father Avraham that rose from the fiery furnace... the fragrance of Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah that rose from the fiery furnace... the fragrance of the Jewish generations that were subject to horrible decrees on account of their religion.”

The *Midrash* thus informs us that the self-sacrifice of Avraham, Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah, and of all the Jews who lived in times of harsh decrees, were instrumental in persuading G-d to say: “Never again will I curse the soil because of man.”

Our Sages ask:⁴ “Why wasn’t the pleasing fragrance of Noach’s offering sufficient? Why was it necessary to include the ‘fragrance’ that rose from the self-sacrifice of all these righteous individuals?”

G-d’s pact with Noach to never destroy the world finds expression in His promise that “As long as the earth lasts, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall never cease.”⁵

The fact that nature now conducts itself entirely without change indicates that it has been vested with an infinite level of holiness,⁶ for nature itself, like all things physical,⁷ does not in and of itself possess the ability to endure without change. It is only because a degree of G-dliness — “I am G-d; I have not changed”⁸ — is vested within nature that it is immutable.

Since this constancy derives from G-d’s infinite power and is revealed specifically in and through nature, it follows that, in order to elicit such a force, a commensurate level of spiritual service within nature is necessary.

This spiritual service is self-sacrifice, *mesirus nefesh*, a service that contains two key elements: *Mesirus nefesh* points to a level of service that is not subject to change — when a person serves G-d with *mesirus nefesh*, then the strongest forces in the world will not keep him from serving in his accustomed manner.

On the other hand, it is specifically through these very hindrances and obstacles that an individual’s power of *mesirus nefesh* is revealed. This is why⁹ the power of *mesirus nefesh* is more prominent during exile than it was while the Holy Temples existed. For the very concealment and difficulty of exile arouses the power of *mesirus*

nefesh. Accordingly, the very concealment that ostensibly hinders spiritual service actually strengthens it, up to and including the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

As lofty as was Noach's spiritual service, it could in no way compare to *mesirus nefesh* — the strength within every Jew that reveals G-d's infinite force within the world, and which enables nature to endure without change. It was thus necessary to include the "fragrance" of those who displayed *mesirus nefesh*.

This also explains why G-d's "remembrance" had to come from the Attribute of Justice and be transformed to Mercy, rather than from the Attribute of Mercy itself.

In order for material nature itself to reveal G-dliness, it is necessary that the Divine Name *Elokim*,¹⁰ which enables nature to exist, be transformed into the Attribute of Mercy, by which G-dliness is revealed.¹¹

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XX, pp. 30-36

FOOTNOTES

1. *Bereishis* 8:1.
2. *Ibid.*, verse 21.
3. *Bereishis Rabbah* 34:9.
4. See *Vayorach* 5654, 5708.
5. *Bereishis* 8:22.
6. See *Akeidah* beginning of Torah portion *Bo*; *HaChodesh* 5666. See also *Likkutei Sichos XVII*, p. 152ff.
7. See *Nosato Li'reiacha* 5711 (p. 291). See also Responsa of *Chacham Tzvi*, Section 18; *Likkutei Torah, Re'eh* 22:c.
8. *Malachi* 3:6.
9. See *Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, Vol. III, p. 121ff.; *Sefer HaMaamarim Yiddish*, p. 5ff.; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5709 p. 118ff.
10. *Elokim* is numerically equivalent to *hatevah* — "that which is natural" (*Pardes, Sha'ar* 12:2). See also *Sheloh* 89a; *Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah* beginning of ch. 6.
11. See *Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah* beginning of ch. 5.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson