

Genuine Satisfaction; Noach's Legacy



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Adapted from

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XX, p. 285ff;

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Our Potential

The Maggid of Mezritch interpreted¹ our Sages' statement:² "Know what is above you," as: "Know that everything 'above' all that transpires in the spiritual realms is 'from you,' dependent on your conduct. Each of us has the potential to influence even the most elevated spiritual realms."

The Torah alludes to this potential in the opening verse of our reading:³ "These are the chronicles of Noach. Noach was a righteous man."

The word *noach* refers to satisfaction and repose.⁴ By repeating the word, the Torah implies that Noach and by extension, every one of his descendants can sow these qualities in two different fields, both among his fellow men, and in the spiritual worlds above.

Every person affects his environment. Our thoughts, words and deeds can inspire peace and tranquillity in our fellow men, helping create meaningful pleasure. And by establishing such conditions in our world, we accentuate similar qualities in the worlds above. To highlight our obligation to spread these virtues, this week's Torah portion is called Noach.⁵

Being Sensitive to G-d's Cues

The name Noach is, however, problematic, for the portion as a whole does not deal with these qualities. On the contrary, the majority of the portion describes the Flood, and its conclusion relates the story of the Tower of Babel. These events and the conduct of mankind which led to them are diametrically opposed to the satisfaction and repose personified by Noach.

The resolution of this difficulty underscores the interrelation between the patterns with which G-d imbued our world and man's response to them. Noach's birth was to begin a period of repose and satisfaction that would encompass the globe. Mankind had the option of taking an active part in this undertaking. Instead, each person continued to live with a narrow focus, concerned only with himself. What another person felt, or questions of Right and Wrong, did not matter. And as a result,⁶ "The world was corrupt... the land was filled with crime."

Waters of Blessing

Then it started to rain. On the verse:⁷ “And it rained for forty days and forty nights,” our Sages commented:⁸ “At the outset, the water descended with mercy, so that if they had repented, the rains would have been rains of blessing. Since they did not repent, the rains became a flood.”

The flood waters, then, were intended to be waters of blessing. For the blessing to be manifest, however, mankind had to make itself fit to receive G-d's influence, and therefore *teshuvah* a return to G-d was necessary. As the rain began to fall, humanity continued to ignore this opportunity, refusing to make such efforts.

But even though mankind did not turn to G-d in *teshuvah*, the rains remained waters of blessing.⁹ The forty days of rain resemble the forty seah of a *mikveh*.¹⁰ Just as immersion in a *mikveh* is associated with re-experiencing the act of creation,¹¹ so too the forty days and forty nights of rain brought about the dawning of a new age: “Noach saw a new world.”¹²

Therefore, the waters of the Flood are called “the waters of Noach,”¹³ because the intent and the actual effect was to bring rest and pleasure to the world. Unfortunately, however, because man did not respond positively, this constructive outcome was coupled with destruction the Flood obliterated every living creature on the face of the Earth.¹⁴

Kindness with Purpose

A similar motif applies with regard to the Tower of Babel, as reflected in our Sages' teaching:¹⁵ “There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham.... All those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Avraham our father came and received the reward of them all.”

The generations that preceded Avraham treated each other with love.¹⁶ Nevertheless, since they “repeatedly angered G-d,” their conduct did not reflect the repose and satisfaction which G-d intended for mankind. Therefore He punished them, scattering them throughout the earth.

Avraham performed deeds of kindness and hospitality with a single purpose to make all mankind conscious of G-d.¹⁷ Through his actions, he displayed the desired form of repose and satisfaction, and therefore received the reward generated by all the comradely deeds of the generations which preceded him.¹⁸

When the Rainbow Shines

On the ark were lions, tigers, and other predators, and yet they dwelt in peace with the other animals, anticipating the fulfillment of the prophecy:¹⁹ “The wolf will dwell with lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat.” Thus our Torah portion foreshadows the ultimate repose and satisfaction that mankind will be granted in the era²⁰ when “there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance.”²¹

By vigorously following in the footsteps of Avraham, spreading kindness and love, we can help precipitate the coming of that age. And then, like Noach and his family, we will merit the shining of the rainbow. As the *Zohar*²² states: “The rainbow reflects spiritual secrets.... When you see the rainbow shining with bright colors, wait for *Mashiach*’s coming.”

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Parshah

Noach

FOOTNOTES

1. Cited in *Or Torah al Aggados Chazal*, p. 112b, explained in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XX, p. 331. See also *In the Paths of Our Fathers* (Kehot, N.Y., 1994).
2. *Avos* 2:1.
3. *Genesis* 10:9.
4. The name Noach (נח) means “rest” in Hebrew, and is associated with the word *nachas* (נחש), which means “pleasure.” See *Bereishis Rabbah* 30:5. *Zohar* Vol. I, p. 58b.
5. Were the name to have been given merely because “Noach” is one of the first words of the portion, this reading should have been called *Toldos*, for this word appears before Noach, and the subsequent portion, which is called *Toldos*, should have been named *Yitzchak*.
6. *Genesis* 10:11.
7. *Genesis* 7:10.
8. *Zohar Chadash* 22a, quoted in *Rashi*’s commentary on the verse.
9. This is implied by the wording of the verse, “And it rained for forty days,” i.e., the entire forty-day period was intended to be one of “rains of blessing.”
10. *Torah Or, Noach* 8c.
11. *Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah* 174, explains that just as initially, all creation emerged from a watery mass, so too, after immersion in a *mikveh*, a person becomes a new entity, charged with new spiritual vitality.
12. *Bereishis Rabbah* 30:8.
13. *Isaiah* 54:9, included in the *Haftorah* of *Parshas Noach*. The *Haftorah* expresses the fundamental intent of the Torah reading. It is often explained that the flood waters are called “the waters of Noach” to indicate that Noach bears a certain responsibility for the Flood. For he did not try hard enough to reach out to the people of his generation and motivate them to do *teshuvah*.
14. *Genesis* 7:23.
15. *Avos* 5:2. See the explanation in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. III, p. 753.
16. *Sanhedrin* 109a.
17. *Sotah* 10a ff.
18. In contrast, as mentioned in the *mishnah* from *Avos* cited previously, Noach did not receive the reward for the generations which preceded him. There are two reasons for this: a) the conduct of these people did not generate reward, for they did not show love to their fellow men; b) as mentioned in footnote 13, Noach did not reach out to his contemporaries, nor did he endeavor to teach them as Avraham did.

19. *Isaiah* 11:6.

21. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim* 12:5.

20. *Sefer HaMaamarim, Eshaleich Liozna*, p. 57.
Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XXV, *Parshas Noach, et al.*

22. Vol. I, p. 72b.

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