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Montreal	5:32	Washington DC	5:56

Weekly Parsha

Noach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And the entire earth had one language with uniform words." (Beresheit 11:1)

This pasuk introduces the discussion of the Dispersion. After the Deluge, humankind reestablishes itself. Population increases. However,

(continued on next page)

Letters

OCTOBER 2006

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Beliefs vs. Facts
Reader: Please answer my questions - I am having a real crisis of belief at this point, and I need your guidance to help me return to the path of Judaism.
As much as it seems so reasonable to accept the Tanach as true, it still seems POSSIBLE that there is more to the story than meets the eye. For example, isn't there a possibility that a small group of Jews faithful to a later prophet, say Jeremiah or Ezra, were willing ON FAITH to believe a "Reconstruction" of their ancient history that he provided? After all, only a select number of people may have had access to books at that time to begin with, and we see how foolish religious Jews slavishly follow their leaders in believing absolute
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(Noach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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society is very homogenous. All people share common ancestors, language, and customs. It is not surprising that Noach's offspring chose to live together and settle in a valley in Shinaar. Humanity joins together in constructing a magnificent city with a tower reaching into the heavens. They feel that this project will create social cohesion. The various members of the community will live together in this impressive city. They will not establish individual settlements. The Almighty objects to this plan. He brings about the development of a variety of languages among the families. The people no longer share a common language. Without this uniting influence, the various families drift apart and establish individual communities. Every incident included in the Torah serves a purpose. Some important lesson is taught. What is the message of this episode?

Our Sages offer a number of responses. Maimonides provides one of the most interesting explanations. Maimonides explains that the Torah asserts that the Almighty created the universe. The Torah recognizes that an obvious objection can be raised. It teaches us that we are descendants from common ancestors. If we are descendants from a single set of ancestors, how can we account for diversity? Humanity is composed of radically diverse societies. There are many different languages and cultures. How can this be reconciled with the proposition that we all descend from Noach? Maimonides explains that the episode of the Dispersion is included in the Torah as a response to this question. The Dispersion established the beginnings of human diversity. This incident is included in the Torah to account for this diversity.

"And Hashem dispersed them from there over the face of the earth. And they desisted from building the city." (Beresheit 11:8)

What was the objective of Noach's descendants in building their tower? It seems from the Chumash that the objective of this project was to create a home for all of humanity. The builders hoped that, through creating this home, a single cohesive society could be nurtured. Hashem intervened and disrupted the builders' plans. He instigated conflicts and division among the builders. The cohesiveness of the group dissolved.

Sub-groups developed. Each group sought to differentiate itself. This led to the creation of diverse cultures and languages. Why did the Almighty disrupt the work of these social planners? It seems that their objective was admirable. Much of the conflict and hatred throughout history is a result of the perceived differences between nations and peoples. These early social engineers had the foresight to work towards preventing this tragedy. It seems that the history of humanity would be far more civilized had these builders succeeded! The Chumash does not clearly indicate the reason for the Almighty's intervention. Therefore, the commentaries differ widely in their interpretation of this incident.

Sforno suggests that the incident must be understood in its context. The Chumash relates this incident immediately prior to the introduction of Avraham. This alludes to some connection

between this incident and the development of Avraham. What is this relationship? These social planners existed at a time in which idolatry was widely practiced. The shared culture of humanity included this religious perspective. If the builders had succeeded, they would have created overwhelming religious uniformity. This uniformity would have encouraged absolute

conformity. It would have been very difficult for any individual to question the religious perspective of all humanity. In addition, it would be very easy to suppress any would-be critic. The fragmenting of society eliminated this problem. Religious diversity was initiated. This made it possible for a thinker, such as Avraham, to question the theologies of his era. Sforno concludes that the Dispersion was essential to the development of Avraham's monotheistic religion. Gershonides suggests another explanation of the incident. He begins with the assumption that the Almighty created a universe governed by natural laws. In such a universe, there is potential for natural disasters. Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods are all part of the pattern of nature. These disasters can destroy communities and wipe out entire populations. However, humanity survives. This is because, generally, these tragedies are localized. A volcano may erupt destroying an entire island. However, a community five hundred miles away will be relatively unaffected. It is obvious that the survival of humanity depends upon its dispersion.

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(Noach continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

If all humanity were to concentrate in a specific geographic area, survival would be endangered. A single catastrophe could destroy all humankind. In order to prevent such a tragedy, Hashem dispersed humanity over the face of the globe. This assured that natural disaster would not jeopardize all of humankind. ■

Sefer Beresheit 7:1. Meschet Eruvin 18b.

Rav Baruch HaLevy Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer Beresheit 6:9.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 50.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 11:6.

Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 98.

"These are the chronicles of Noach. Noach was a righteous man. He was faultless in his generation. Noach walked with Hashem." (Beresheit 6:9)

The Torah describes the righteousness of Noach. The pasuk uses three terms to describe Noach. He was righteous. He was faultless in his behavior. He followed the Almighty completely. Noach is selected by Hashem to survive the Deluge and reestablish humanity. Hashem addresses Noach and explains the reasons he has been selected. He tells Noach he will be saved because of his righteousness. In speaking to Noach, Hashem mentions only one of the terms previously used to describe Noach's spiritual perfection. Our Sages attach an important lesson from the Almighty's brevity in speaking to Noach. When praising a person in the recipient's presence, we should be mentioning only a portion of the person's virtues. In contrast, outside of the recipient's presence, we should freely identify all of the person's strengths.

This is a difficult lesson to understand. We praise a person in order to communicate our appreciation of the individual's positive qualities. We are required to restrict the breadth of this commendation in the presence of the recipient. It seems that this restriction prevents us from fully expressing our appreciation. It would seem that our debt of appreciation would require the most full expression when the recipient is present! Furthermore, the Torah places great emphasis on honesty. When we limit our praise, we are less than fully truthful. These questions indicate that some overriding consideration is present. What is this consideration?

Torah Temimah suggests an answer to these questions. In order to fully appreciate his answer, we must begin by drawing from personal experience. Try to recall the last time you were present at a testimonial dinner. Often, the various speakers describe the honoree with countless superlatives. What goes through your mind? You may wonder whether the honoree a mere mortal can really embody these many forms of perfection. You may conclude that the speakers are engaged in an

elaborate process of flattery. The various accolades are not derived from an honest appraisal of the recipient. Instead, they are shamelessly designed to impress the honoree. An irony emerges. The overblown praises have had the opposite of the desired effect upon the audience. The audience begins to wonder where the border lies between reality and exaggeration. The speakers have compromised their credibility. Even the truthful elements of the praise are suspect. In a private conversation outside of the presence of the recipient, we would not be inclined to be as suspicious. The subject of the wonderful appraisal is not present. We conclude that this assessment cannot be designed to flatter. The recipient is not aware of the praise received. In this case, the person addressing us has more credibility. We are more inclined to judge the praise as sincere. Now, let us return to the testimonial.

How could the speakers preserve their integrity? After all, they are charged with the responsibility of complimenting the virtues of the honoree! How can they discharge this duty without being accused of flattery? This is the issue our Sages are addressing. The speakers must carefully remain within the boundaries of credibility. This requires avoiding exaggeration. This may even demand that the speakers show some reserve. Through limiting their praise, the speakers win the trust of the audience. Limited accolades make a greater impression than overblown praise. This is because the impression of flattery is avoided. In short, credibility dictates that the speakers resist identifying every positive quality of the honoree. This, then, is the lesson of our Sages. In the presence of the recipient, limited praise is more effective. Outside of the presence of the recipient, we are less suspect of flattery. We may be more liberal in our appraisal.

There is another possible explanation of our Sages' message. This explanation requires that we consider interpersonal relations. We know that some individuals feel appreciated. Others feel grossly unappreciated. What is the reason for these different perceptions? There are many possible explanations. Let us consider one of these. We all want to be appreciated. How do we determine if we are fully appreciated? This requires an act of personal appraisal. We compare our self-perception to the way in which others see us. If we conclude that others perceive all of our fine qualities, we are pleased. We are satisfied with our friends. They recognize our positive aspects. However, what occurs if there is a divergence between the self-appraisal and the assessment of others? Assume this self-perception includes numerous positive aspects. Others fail to recognize these virtues. How will this individual react? It is likely that this divergence in perceptions will result in frustration

and anger. The individual will feel that he or she is not appreciated. This person will ask why others do not see all his or her virtues. It is also likely this person will eventually become angry. It follows that the happier of these two individuals is the one whose self-appraisal is more modest. This person will also be more capable of living in peace with others. How can we encourage this type of relationship? In short, can we help assure that the individual's self-perception will not be inflated in relation to others' perception of the individual?

Perhaps, our Sages are addressing this issue. They are attempting to establish healthy interpersonal relations. Through praising an individual more fully in the person's absence, an important result occurs. Those hearing the full account of the person's virtues will be impressed. Hopefully, their estimation of the recipient of the praise will be greater than the recipient's own estimation of self-worth. The recipient has never heard the full measure of this praise. Others see in the individual greater virtue than the person perceives in him/her self. The individual will feel appreciated and valued by others. Positive interpersonal relations are fostered. ■

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Letters

nonsense and superstition and tales of alleged Kabbalistic miracles all the time. Maybe a later prophet provided these stories about an Exodus and Revelation for pious reasons, to encourage people to keep the religion, but mixed in the history to make it seem more convincing for future generations.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: As we had explained before, your suggested historical account of mass fabrication could never take place. People know their history and no individual could meet with any success, convincing the masses otherwise. Even if one were to locate a backwards colony today, as you state, who "follow their leaders in believing absolute nonsense" and suggest to them that what they all know to be their history is in fact otherwise...such a fabricator would not be accepted. But a charismatic leader could successfully force the masses to "believe" something, as is the case with Christianity, which did not contradict adherents' own historical knowledge.

You correctly suggest that people do blindly accept leaders who suggest nonsense. And this takes place today, where our Jewish leaders condone red bendels and the like. But let's clarify the distinction. In this latter case of red bendels, such views are accepted by the masses, as they do not contradict any 'popular' fact, although they contradict reason. But most people do not live strictly by reason...so they accept alluring promises of red bendels. One will say, "I don't know how it works, but maybe something out there makes the bendel work". Or, "Hey, it can't hurt." But this same person will not quit his job, assuming the red bendel to miraculously provide for him and his family. He will not wear a bendel to cure his limb severed in a car accident. Why not? The answer is that every person functions with some level of reality...and when one's life is at stake, he will rely more heavily on proven methods of living. He will not rely on "probability"... like the red bendel.

In application to the first case of mass fabrication, again, no one will deny known fact. People know their history, and will not reject it, for any reason. The mind cannot be bribed.

Rabbi Reuven Mann once offered a fine analogy: if Jesus would tell you that the Twin Towers never collapsed, or if Jesus caused all victims and the Towers, to return to their state pre-9/11...but Jesus would say that God is both one and three simultaneously, your mind could not tolerate such a contradiction, regardless of the wonders produced. In the first case, you would not deny the 9/11 tragedies, nor could you accept the Trinity. Miracles cannot make the mind accept what is impossible. Therefore, mass fabrication cannot succeed, as it too asks one to deny his mind. But when it comes to asking one to accept a 'belief', which does not contradict any clear fact, desperate people will abandon critical thinking, and follow what their emotions desire.



However, if this same person would analyze this or any false belief, he or she too would reject red bendels and other nonsense, as clearly and readily as they reject mass fabrication. It is due to the popular trend in Judaism today, to follow what ever any leader suggests, or what is printed, and accept these lies as truths. Leaders themselves are products of foolish teachings from their schooldays, and thus, these idolatrous beliefs proliferate.

In the end, if one seeks the truth, he or she has all the tools to determine truth: God gave each one of us a Tzelem Elohim, "intelligence". Just as one will not quit his or her job, or deny medical treatment, relying on a red bendel to provide...this should awaken such individuals to question why they accept the other promises of colored strings.

Reader: Isn't it also possible that an original kernel of truth - say, the Exodus occurring - was later expanded to include the miraculous details like the Red Sea splitting or Mount Sinai? These 'legends' might have been introduced by people who already believed in Torah, to make it seem more impressive.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Same answer.

Reader: Also, doesn't the account of Moses' death in the Torah make it seem improbable that he wrote it himself?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Could he not have written the entire Torah, except for those last verses, or even those verses he wrote as well, via prophecy? The Rabbis suggest these two possibilities, which make perfect sense.

Reader: I can't help but wonder one more thing: Isn't it possible that only a small group of believers originally accepted the story of Sinai, and that the death and exile of the unbelievers, as well as the propagation of the believers, ended up creating a situation where everyone agreed on the same story? The opposition was naturally eliminated, with only the assenters left.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: But now you rewrite history, as the history we possess says 2.5 million Jews endured, they experienced all these miracles, and lived on. No record of mass deaths.

Reader: Can you also include an approach to how to deal with things that seem totally irrational in Torah and Gemara, like the snake talking to Adam and Eve, the incorrect belief that they were the first "humans" when there were in fact people walking around for tens of thousands of years prior to that, the idea that the sun stood still for Joshua which is scientifically absurd beyond any of the other miracles in Tanach, and the legends about Rabbis interacting with demons and performing magic when they were supposedly sages?

Is there a general way to deal with these things? Are we sacrificing our common sense and intellect for a supposedly intellectual system? Why, if Judaism is so rational, are these things included - they require us to stretch the limits of credulity too much.

Thank You, Jonathan

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: God controls nature, as He created it. Therefore, what is so problematic if He desires to suspend natural law, and create talking animals, or halt the heavenly bodies? Regarding accounts in the Gemara, demons, apparent magic, etc., ...the Sages crafted each story. These were men wise, wise beyond what we attribute. King Solomon too spoke in riddles, as he states in the title of his great work "Proverbs". He opens with the reasoning for his Proverbs, "to understand the riddles of the Rabbis". So if these Talmudic accounts are metaphors and riddles, each story must be studied, to uncover the riddle. The Rabbis purposely hid in riddle format, true ideas which the masses might reject or misunderstand. Only those who have achieved a level of Talmudic acumen will be able to decipher these riddles. Others will - or should - reject the literal understanding as you have, realizing their impossible nature. But as far as amazing stories in the Torah, Prophets and Writings, we do not suggest the literal story to be a metaphor, unless it is impossible to understand literally. But regarding Talmudic stories, like those concerning demons, magic, etc., ...we have a tradition that the Rabbis spoke in riddles. Therefore, we do not seek to validate such amazing stories, but rather, to decipher them. ■



Reader: Very much enjoyed your above article that appeared in the IsraPost. I am completing a research project literally proving that only a Supreme Power could have issued the Torah to Moses. My proof is based on the fact that everything in the story of Creation is supported by the fact that it is in sync with science.

The ramifications are mind-boggling and I have two requests of you if I may:

1) In your article you wrote that the Torah 'commands in so many places' that our determination of God's existence must be arrived at by proof. Might you advise me of those Torah references?

2) May I speak to you about my project and perhaps you may wish to review it?

Thank you, Dr. Solomon Huriash

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Yes, I will be glad to review your project. Now for the references...

Avraham Avenu

(Taken from Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, section on Idolatry, Chap.1:3)

"Once the mighty ancient (Avraham) was weaned, he began to ponder in his mind, and he was still a child, and he began to consider day and night, and he was amazed that there could be this sphere operating regularly without a guide, one who causes it to rotate, as it is impossible that it should rotate itself. And he (Avraham) had no teacher nor informant, rather, he was entrenched in Ur Casdim amongst the foolish idolaters, and his father and mother and all the people worshiped the stars, and he (Avraham) worshiped with them, but his heart stirred and he understood until he reached the truth and understood the line of truth from his own proper understanding. And he knew there was One God Who guided the sphere and created everything and that there was no other god to be found besides Him. And he knew the entire world was mistaken and the matter which

caused them to make this error was that they served the stars and (physical) formations until they lost the truth from their minds. And at 40 years of age, Avraham recognized his Creator. Once he recognized and knew, he began responding on the inhabitants of Ur Casdim and calling them to court saying this is not the way of truth which you follow, and he broke the idols, and he began to inform the people that it is not fitting to worship (anyone) except for the God of the world, and it is fitting that one sacrifice and pour libations to Him so other generations will recognize Him. And it is fitting to destroy and break all the (idolatrous) formations so the whole people won't be led astray, like these who think there is no God, only these (idols). Once (Avraham) succeeded over them with proofs the king sought to kill him, and there was done for him a miracle and he went to Charan. And he began to stand and call in a great voice and made known to the whole world there is One God to the whole world and unto Him one should worship."

Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses)

(Deut. 4:9): "Guard yourselves and guard your souls exceedingly, lest you forget the things your eyes saw..."

(Deut. 4:34)"all the signs and wonders which God has performed for you in Egypt as your eyes have seen".

(Deut. 4:35) "You have been demonstrated to know that God is Elokim, there is no other besides Him".

(Deut. 4:36) "From the heavens He made heard His voice to prove you, and on land He showed you His great fire and His words you heard from amidst the fire".

(Deut. 4:39). "You have been shown to know that God is God"

Was Moses lying to the people? Would the Jews have proliferated Moses' words had they not been convinced themselves? One need not be told what he has seen with his own eyes. The

Jews knew they witnessed proof of God's existence. They therefore passed it on to their children as it was undeniable proof. If one today says we have no proof of God, that person denies not only Moses, but also God, as God instructed Moses to teach these words as part of the Torah.

Saadia Gaon

(Commencing remarks from his work "Emunas v'Daos")

"Blessed be God, the God of Israel, Who is alone deserving of being regarded as the Evident Truth, Who verifies with certainty unto rational beings, the existence of their souls, by means of which they access accurately what they perceive with their senses and apprehend correctly the objects of their knowledge. Uncertainties are thereby removed from them and proofs become clear. May He be lauded then above the highest commendation and praise".

Malbim

(His commentary on the last three words of Haftoras Bamidbar - Hosea 2:22)

"You should know God, that He revealed His signs and wonders and the dwelling of His shechina among you, until you would know God with clear knowledge as something perceived by the senses, (in order that) you should no longer require belief. Because belief is something which has no clear knowledge, (it is) simply acceptance, but they have to them knowledge to know God, which is greater than belief".

Ramban (Nachmanides)

(Deut. 4:9) "For if the words of the Torah had come to us only through the mouth of Moses, even though his prophecy was verified with signs and wonders, yet 'if there were to arise in the midst of us a prophet or a dreamer of dreams' and he were to command us to do the opposite of what the Torah commanded us, 'and he [were to] give us a sign or wonder' then a doubt would enter the people's hearts. But since the Torah reaches us from the mouth of the Almighty to our ears, and our eyes behold that there is no intermediary, we will reject anyone who differs and who casts doubt [upon the words of the Torah] and will declare him to be false."

Ramban is certain of the event at Sinai, but only due to the fact that the story of Sinai must be provable. Otherwise, a false prophet will have an equal argument that we follow him, as he has signs too. But since we have proof, "...reaches us from the mouth of the Almighty to our ears" we do not follow him.

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Letters

R. Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda

(Author of "Duties of the Heart", or "Chovas Halevavos")

Excerpts from his introduction: "Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly G-d's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence."

"If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator."

Devarim 17:8-10 states: "If a case should prove too difficult for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, between (leprous) mark and mark, or other matters of dispute in your courts,you must act in accordance with what they tell you."

Regarding this passage, Rabbi Bachya states: "the verse does not say,.....simply accept them on the authority of Torah sages,....and rely exclusively on their tradition. Rather, (Scripture) says that you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth become clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the G-d in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other". (Ibid, 4:39)

Additionally in his entire Gate of Unity, R. Bachaya uses numerous proofs demonstrating the existence of a Creator and His Unity. The rabbi does not engage in mere belief. One proof I will list here:

"Chap. 1: What is the definition of the whole-hearted acknowledgement of God's Unity? The accord of heart and tongue in acknowledging the unity of the Creator, after arriving at verification - through argument - of His existence and absolute oneness, by way of analysis."

Rav Hai Gaon

(Academy head at Pumbedisa in Babylon)

Recorded in Ramban's "Letter to the French Rabbis", 18 stanzas from the end: "However, those who devote themselves to the Torah and the fear of heaven are free from such [detrimental effects] for they undoubtedly lead the masses to a good future, and they have no dilemma about [their belief in] the Holy One, blessed be He".

Maimonides (Rambam)

His first principle of the 13 Principles: "To know the existence of the Creator".

His first statements in the Mishneh Torah: "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a First Cause. And He is the cause for all existences. And all that is found from the heavens and earth and what is between them do not exist except for the reality of His existence."

"It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things: 1) clear proof deriving from man's reasoning; 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses; 3) what is received from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: "This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15). -Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

"The great sickness and the "grievous evil" (Eccles. 5:12, 15) consist in this: that all the things that man finds written in books, he presumes to think of as true—and all the more so if the books are old." -Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

"For all His ways are judgment." (Deut. 32:4).

Rabbi Judah HaLevi (The Kuzari)

Paragraph 67: "Heaven forbid that there should be anything in the Bible to contradict that which is manifest or proved!"

The entire sefer the Kuzari unfolds as and endless series of proofs presented by Judah HaLevi. He uses proofs to demonstrate to the King that God exists and how He functions with man.

Dr. Solomon Huriash, I address the following not to specifically to you, but to all.

Unfortunately there exists a poor outlook, which is damaging the souls of many Jews. I refer to the Christian ethic of "blind faith". Or as Jews have adopted and refer to as "emuna pshuta".

Yes, Judaism believes in emuna - faith - but that is limited to the fact that God keeps His word. But emuna is not what is requested of us to determine God's very existence. His Existence must be arrived at by proof. This is what the Torah commands in so many places, and precisely why we are creatures endowed with an intellect.

Too many unlearned educators are destroying the potential of fine, Jewish souls through their ignorant teachings. Perhaps their approach secures them to have an "out", as one might feel if he searches and finds a proof for God's existence, then he must keep all His commands with no justification for his occasional defiance. Perhaps that heavenly yoke, that type of vice grip on his actions is intolerable.

There are many emotions which contribute to the proliferation of this blind faith acceptance, but Judaism contains no support. The community leaders who promulgate this disease do so based on other uninformed leaders, not Torah texts. Based on the sources quoted here, and their reasoning, one realizes that "blind faith" is contrary to Judaism and God's goal in designing man with an intellect. Are we to say that in the most essential area of man's life - knowledge of God - man is to abandon his highest element of intelligence and simply believe? In business and other matters, man uses his mind as far as he can to secure his great wealth. But in knowledge of the Almighty, he wrongly assumes he fulfills his purpose with faith. How far from the truth and from the accepted opinions of all our great teachers this is.

It is much easier to shelter one's ignorance behind a claim that belief is superior to knowledge. This obviates the need to exert oneself and break his teeth on a Tosafos. But knowledge comes only to those who yearn for it and toil in study, "in accordance with the pain is the reward", "in accordance with the knowledge is the love of God". It is inexcusable that educators have not read the words of Moshe Rabbeinu, Rav Hai Gaon, Ramban, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Chovas Halevavos, Kuzari, the Vilna Gaon, Saadia Gaon, and even King Solomon's own words. "Wisdom laughs at the fall of the simpletons, scorners and fools"(Proverbs 1:26).

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Letters

Some claim that proof is of no need, and that proof is only needed for the physical world, but not the "unlimited" world of knowledge and God. In other worldly matters, these same individuals engage reason, but not in their religion. Their actions contradict them. "Do they not see there is fallacy in their right hand?"

Man cannot escape the function of reason, nor a world which functions by reason. Even the metaphysical world was created by the infinitely wise God. It too abides by systems of knowledge, as opposed to the wrongly professed assumptions where everyone conjures up his own view of how God manages the world. They have no concern for rational explanation. The self-aggrandizement achieved by discussing "lofty" subjects, and the emotional attraction to so-called "mystical" topics has deterred many unsuspecting Jews from the Talmudic study essential for clear thinking.

This type of "emuna pshuta" is contrary to man's design, it is the opposite of God's goal for man, and is against how the universe functions. It destroys the critical thinking of man responsible for all the great achievements of these great men listed here. This faulty approach also deters the uninitiated from experiencing the true beauty of learning, with all of its consistent philosophy, halachik formulae, and perfectly structured verses.

Preaching fantastic, emotionally stimulating notions, many of today's leaders present Judaism as a mystical, unintelligible collection of miraculous Rabbi stories. Their inconsistency with the methodology seen in the writings of these noted rabbis should awaken any intelligent person to the reality that they are not teaching Torah, as these Rabbis have taught.

None of these or any other of the Baalei Hamesora, the masters of Torah tradition, says that we are to simply have faith. This is Christianity. We must not be swayed by the large numbers of Jews who hold onto faith, for numbers is no argument for truth. We are taught to be convinced by reason, as these Rabbis stressed.

If one feels he or she must follow their peers and not these Rabbis, then you must work on your independence of thought, and you must study these areas of knowledge of God slowly and carefully, confirming to yourself with 100% conviction in each idea as you progress. Knowledge is unshakeable, belief sways.

Strive to comprehend what your mind tells you as truth. This is why God has created us with an intellect, to engage its use in the most essential of areas, knowledge of God. ■



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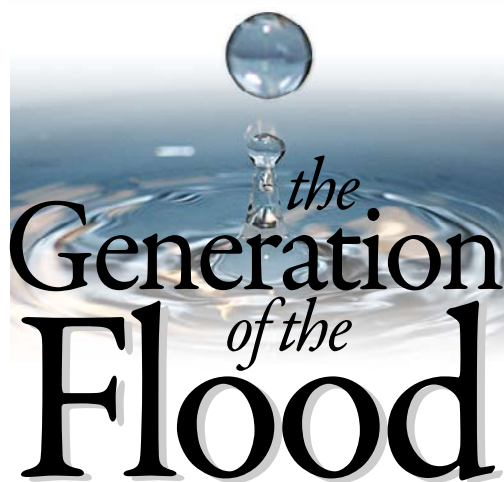
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NOACH

Rabbi Israel Chait

Transcribed by students

In order to appreciate the milieu of the generation of the flood and the events that led to the destruction of civilization, we must analyze the verses in the Torah. Genesis 6:11 states "And the Earth was corrupted before G-d and the Earth was filled with violence." Rashi defines corruption as sexual immorality and idolatry. He defines violence as robbery. This verse is the prelude to G-d's determination that civilization must be destroyed because of the perpetuation of "chamas" (violence) throughout mankind. Thus chamas, robbery, sealed man's fate.

However, this final adjudication by G-d of man's fate was actually preceded by two earlier observations and warnings. Chapter six verse two states, "That the sons of G-d saw the daughters of man that they were fair, and they took for themselves wives, whomsoever they chose." Man was promiscuous and sought all types of sexual gratification without any moral restrictions. G-d thereby gave man his first warning. Man was given 120 years to repent from his sexual corruption or G-d would destroy mankind.

In chapter six verse five, G-d makes his second observation, "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This observation of the quantitative increase in man's nefarious conduct led G-d to the conclusion that he will obliterate mankind from upon the face of the earth.

An analysis of these observations and warnings from G-d indicates a logical progression and sequence from man's initial corruption, until his ultimate degradation, to total depravity unworthy of salvation.

The first breakdown of the morality of man was his sexual promiscuity. Man's detachment from sexual illicit relationships is the source of man's sanctity.

Kedusha - sanctity - emanates from sexual abstinence. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in the laws of Kedusha has two categories: the laws of forbidden sexual relationships and the laws of forbidden foods. Thus we see that the sanctity of man stems from his ability to subordinate his instinctual desires. Kedusha is the supremacy of the "Tzelem Elokim", (man's intellect) over the "nefesh habehami", (man's instinctual desires), the appetitive and the sexual. Thus the first corruption of man was in allowing his emotions to rule his intellect.

The second step was the 'quantitative' increase in man's degradation. As man's libido and energies became attached to the instinctual pleasures, they obviously became a greater source of satisfaction for man. Thus, man's corruption became prevalent throughout society. The emotions of man totally dominated all aspects of his conduct. Hence, G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great.

However, the final corruption, which sealed man's fate, was when his depravity progressed to robbery. Nachmanides states that man's fate was sealed with the sin of robbery because it is a violation of a "mitzvah sichli" - a command arrived at through reason (without the need for G-d's command, i.e., something obvious). The prohibition against stealing logically makes sense. As Nachmanides says, it's a commandment, which does not require a prophet to warn us against its evils. However, Nachmanides' message must be understood. Simply because a commandment does not necessitate a prophet to warn us against its violation, does not reflect upon the severity of the prohibition. It would seem that there are greater evils, which result from violating a mitzva, which is not sichli (reasonably obvious) and requires a prophet's warning. On the contrary, if our conduct warrants the rebuke of a prophet it must certainly be extremely grievous behavior. However, an analysis of Nachmanides interpretation leads us to a better understanding of the corruption of thievery and the reason it sealed man's destruction.

Man is different than an animal. An animal's existence is purely instinctual. His reality is subservient to his instinctual desires. An animal's existence is totally contained within the realm of the physical. An animal does not contemplate how long it is going to live.

Man however, is a complex creature. Man's nature is perennially the source of conflict. The instinctual desires of man are constantly in conflict with the intellectual.

Instinctually, man desires to live forever, but reality tells him that he is limited by the constraints of time. As a result there are essentially only two

creations that are not in a constant state of conflict; the animal, because it is totally dominated and guided by the instinctual, and harmonious man, whose entire energies are directed towards wisdom. However an ordinary individual's instinctual desires are in conflict with, and tempered by his intellectual faculties.

The original pratfall for man was sexual turpitude. The sexual instinct was overpowering, yet, man had not abandoned the intellectual. In fact, man utilized his wisdom in the pursuit of his desires.

However, man was doomed to extinction when violence prevailed. Robbery is reflective of a society that totally abandons the rules of common sense. Man was no longer functioning in the world of reality. He was no longer using his mind in the pursuit of his physical pleasures. He was involved in violent, self-destructive behavior. This is what Nachmanides meant when he said that violence sealed man's fate because it was a violation of an obviously, reasonable law. Man was entirely in the grasp of his instinctual desires - to the extent - that his intellectual faculties were no longer functioning. Therefore, the warning of a prophet would not be heeded since man is functioning solely in the realm of the physical world. His self-destructive behavior manifests the abandonment of the intellectual, even as a means for the pursuit of physical pleasures. Violence epitomizes the state of the domination of the instincts. Thus, G-d determined that man's existence was equal to his non-existence and civilization was destined to be obliterated.

It is significant to note that violence flourished and was fostered by man's initial domination by his sexual desires. It is when man abandons the intellectual repression of sexual promiscuity, that his instinctual appetites be cultivated and ultimately dominates him. Merely because the violations of the sexual mores are victimless infractions, does not diminish the severity of the offense. It is the breeding ground whereby a corrupt individual's instinctual desires gain strength and overpower the intellectual, and thus, subjugate the tzelem Elokim - the intellect - to the whims of the physical. Chamas - violence - is a natural outgrowth of such a behavioral progression and condemns mankind to a worthless existence.

Noach however, did not fall prey to the corruption of the society. Although he was considered righteous, the Rabbis castigate him for not attempting to influence other people. Noach never tried to influence his fellow man to behave in a just fashion. This is bothersome, considering the fact that the Torah refers to Noach as a tzadik, a righteous and pure individual. Certainly, justice would dictate that he help the plight of his fellow man. Thus, we must appreciate the appellation tzadik as utilized in respect to Noach.

There are two types of righteous individuals:

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Abraham typifies the higher level. This is the just individual who lives in a corrupt society and functions therein. In terms of his personal ideals (of monotheism) they were foreign to the values of that society. He was a foreigner in this respect. However, he was a citizen of the world. He functioned externally as a productive member of society. In fact, he attempted to influence other members of society to adopt his values and ideals.

The other type of righteous individual cannot tolerate the influences of a corrupt society. He retreats and lives the life of seclusion always insulating himself from external pressures. Noah was this type of personality. The Rabbis teach us that Noah was a ma-amin, he was a believer, but yet he did not believe. He possessed the intellectual conviction to reject society's values. However, he was cognizant of the temptations of the world around him and thus lived a sheltered life. Noah appreciated that he was in conflict and could not risk the dangerous exposure of facing the outside world. He lived an existence whereby he realized he was in conflict, but resolved the conflict in favor of the intellect. Therefore God did not blame him for not attempting to influence others. His state of perfection prevented him from helping others. Thus, Noah was righteous and pure, but yet, the Torah adds "b-dorosav", "in his generation" (was he perfect). His actions were not inherently corrupt and thus he was not deserving of extinction. However, his righteousness was commensurate to the times he lived in. He was indirectly culpable because his state of perfection prevented him from venturing into the outside world and aiding others. However, he still was righteous, for one cannot be held responsible for not helping others live the proper life if it would risk his own perfection. Thus Noah was a tzadik in his generation. ■

the Tower of Babel

NOACH

Rabbi Israel Chait
Transcribed by students

It is a well-established principle in Judaism that a punishment from G-d is unique. When G-d punishes man, it is for his betterment. However, the generation of the flood was destroyed because there was no justifica-

tion for their existence. In contrast, the generation that built the tower of Babel was not destroyed. We must therefore understand the reason that their destruction was not warranted. We must also comprehend the nature of their punishment and the manner in which it was beneficial for them.

The reason that G-d prefers for their not being destroyed was because their sin was only against G-d. This is in contrast to the generation of the flood whose decadence was prevalent with respect to interpersonal relationships as well. However, the "dor haflaga", generation of the dispersment, had extremely cordial and respectful relations and acted peaceably toward each other. This concept must be explained. Simply because their interpersonal relations were peaceful and harmonious is hardly sufficient justification for their salvation. A person can be totally wicked but his relationship with his friends can be eminently serene. The Nazi's were very cordial, cultured and peaceful towards their fellow Nazi's. It is evident that the Torah is teaching us a more esoteric message.

We must also explain what they were attempting to build. Genesis 11:4 states "And they said: Come let us build a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." What was their purpose and objective in building this tower?

In order to appreciate the significance of this entire incident we must elaborate some well-defined psychological principles.

Every human being has a certain emotional make up. These emotions - although somewhat controllable - nevertheless find a way to be expressed in terms of human behavior. A person has certain emotional needs and desires and is capable of repressing them to a great degree, but these needs will ultimately find some form of expression in terms of that individual's conduct. As a result, if the person is successful in controlling his emotions concerning one area of his behavior, invariably, these emotions will find an outlet for their expression in another area of his conduct. An illustration of this is when a person is angry because of a business transaction that failed. Instead of expressing his anger at his business partner who mishandled the transaction, he might go home and break something. The emotions of man are flexible enough, that they will seek a "Substitute Formation," an alternate way to express itself.

The emotions of man are also very cunning and can operate in a disguised fashion. They can function in such a way as to be hidden - even to the person himself. Madison Avenue, the renowned center of advertising, carefully manipulates the emotions in this manner. A person who fantasizes that he's a great cowboy will smoke Marlboro. These are called hidden persuaders. A person is not just buying the product, but he is buying the underlying fantasy it represents. If one were to ask the

person if he was a cowboy, of course he would reject such a notion.

All these characteristics of our emotions and the methods in which they work together regarding the many nuances of human behavior, can help us understand the events surrounding the Tower of Babel.

Upon observing mankind's conduct in building the Tower of Babel, G-d makes the following comment in Genesis 11:6, "And the lord said: Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do, and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they propose to do."

To help us appreciate this observation we must elucidate a very basic psychological process that accounts for much of man's altruistic behavior. Psychologists call this mechanism "identification". The greater effect an event has upon a person, the more significant the event. Thus, an earthquake in China killing 10,000 people might not seem as tragic to you as the mugging of your next-door neighbor. Conversely, a person stricken with cancer might bequeath great sums of money to anti smoking crusades. However, the tragic effects of cancer were surely known prior to his misfortune. Although a person's efforts in this regard are praiseworthy and humanitarian, and contribute to the benefit of society, it is not the highest level of just conduct. A rare individual, who functions according to an extremely high standard of human justice, is aroused mainly by the event and not the manner in which he is affected thereby. However, identification is generally a desired emotion that accounts for much of the good in society and allows a person to commiserate with his fellow man. If one lacks identification, the consequences could be tragic.

Now we can begin to comprehend G-d's observation. "Behold they are one nation with one language" Language is a strong factor with respect to human identification. Language represents unification. Private groups have their own special language and secret codes. Kids usually have their own slogans and phrases to help them identify with other kids - against the adults. Thus, G-d observed that mankind was one nation with one language. There was great identification amongst, and unification with, their fellow man. However, we must analyze how this identification contributed to their building the Tower of Babel. In Genesis 11:5 the Torah states, "And G-d came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built." Rashi comments that this term the "children of man" is superfluous. He thus comments that these are the children of 'man who rebelled against the one G-d' that were saved from the flood.

We therefore see that the sin of these people was their rebellion against G-d. However, their animosity and rebellion against G-d was really a result of their identification with their fellow man.

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Weekly Parsha

Man's basic innate nature is aggressive. This is attested to by the many atrocities committed by man throughout the annals of history. Man generally directed his aggression in the form of hateful acts perpetrated upon his fellow man. However, the generation of the Tower of Babel had a tremendous sense of identification with their fellow man, fostered by their being one nation with one language. It was also strengthened by their being the survivors of the Flood. This shared experience as alluded to by Rashi, also caused them to identify with each other. This identification prevented their aggressive conduct from being directed against their fellow man. Thus, man's aggressive proclivities were directed against G-d. Their emotions of hatred and their aggressive tendencies found a substitute formation, namely G-d. Their inherent aggressive tendencies, which are usually directed one against another, now found an alternate means of expression - a rebellion against G-d. However, these people whose ancestors were recently obliterated by G-d because of their corruption, could not in good sense, express open hostility and hatred to G-d. Thus, this hatred presented itself in a different way. They said, "Let us build a city and a tower with its head in the heavens."

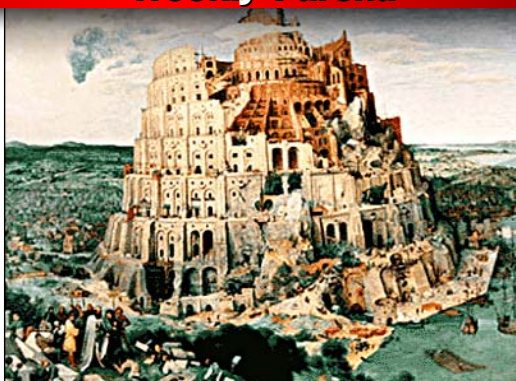
The tower represents architecture. This building was not built to be functional, as they were not going to use the building. On the contrary, it was a manifestation of their own power and importance. This is what architecture represents throughout civilization. Albeit the Eiffel Tower, or The Coliseum, all great architectural works are merely an expression of the power and significance of that particular society.

Individuals as well display this same attitude. A person who lives in a mansion with a huge driveway, is also generally creating an impression of his own self importance. Therefore the peoples' method for rebelling against G-d was demonstrating the greatness of man's accomplishments. It is the deification of man.

Mankind, by building the Tower of Babel, was manifesting the greatness of man, and in so doing, was rebelling against G-d. This was the sin of this generation.

Halacha recognizes this emotion. The migdal, tower, was an elaborately ornate and beautifully appointed structure intended to inspire man. However, these emotions were directed towards the greatness of man, and not G-d. Conversely, halacha (Jewish law) demands that the tallest building in a community must be the synagogue. G-d must maintain the greatest prominence in our minds.

G-d thereby concludes verse 6, that mankind, because of this attitude of the overestimation of their own self importance, will feel that nothing can be withheld from them and that there is nothing that they can not accomplish. G-d realized that this emotion was dangerous and must be dealt with



accordingly. Thus in Chapter 11 verse 7, G-d responds, "Come, let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." G-d was confounding their language as the vehicle to break their identification with each other. Once they had different languages, different cultures would flourish. When G-d changed their culture and language, hatred and jealousy commenced. When each society has its own unique culture and language, the identification between the different societies is mitigated greatly. This enables man's aggressive instinct to express itself, by acts of hatred and aggression against another society. Therefore G-d's punishment (corrective measure) was breaking the strong sense of identification that existed throughout mankind. The emergence of different societies with different cultures erased the identification that had previously existed between these groups. Consequently, man's aggressive tendencies were thereafter naturally directed against citizens of a different society with different values. The natural outgrowth of G-d's punishment is a civilization where there are constant wars between different segments of society. However, the alternative would be worse, whereby mankind would rebel against G-d. Judaism maintains that mankind will experience constant strife until the coming of the Messiah. It is only when Messiah comes that people will possess the proper philosophical knowledge. Then mankind will be able to channel their energies to the acquisition of wisdom and gain a love of G-d. It is only then that mankind can experience true peace.

We can therefore appreciate the necessity of G-d's punishment. However we must contrast the generation of the Flood that had to be destroyed and the generation of the Tower of Babel, which was spared. G-d's punishment was obviously more lenient with the generation of the Tower of Babel. The bothersome problem is that hatred and rebellion against G-d seems to be a greater evil than the corruption of man. Yet, the generation of the Flood was eradicated and the generation of the Tower of Babel was spared.

The proper determination of this problem demands that we pose a different question. We must not investigate which malady was 'worse',

but rather, which transgression is 'curable'. If a disease is incurable, then it leads to an inevitable end. However, if there is a cure, then there is hope, irrespective of the severity of the disease. The citizens of the generation of the Flood were totally overwhelmed by their evil inclinations, their instinctual appetites. Their intellectual faculties were not functioning and thus there was no way to influence them. The generation of the Tower of Babel however suffered the disease of overestimation of the self. Although G-d cannot fathom an arrogant person, as the power of the ego is great - denying G-d - yet, such a person can still be reached. The conceited individual still operates on a rational level; he is just afflicted with the malady of the overestimation of his own self-importance.

The Rabbis tell us that the generation of the flood had no shalom, peace, but the generation of the Tower of Babel had serenity. Peace requires self-control and intelligence. The generation of the Tower of Babel, although unified for a terrible cause, still possessed the essential elements required for harmony. Therefore, G-d's punishment was to confound their language and break their identification. This resulted in man's aggressive instinct to be directed away from G-d. Unfortunately, society is at a level whereby man's aggressive instincts express themselves by man's perpetuation of great atrocities against his fellow man. People usually try to deny their aggressive instincts and ultimately that causes much bloodshed. Judaism, on the contrary demands that a person lives his life based upon reality. A person must be aware of his aggressive tendencies. It is a universal emotion that stems from the instinctual part of man's nature. However, a person must learn to subordinate his instinctual desire and to live his life based upon wisdom. The Talmud tells us if a person is overly aggressive he should become a butcher. A person should recognize his instinctual nature, and learn to control it. Piety is not the denial of one's emotional needs and desires. Judaism does not preach asceticism and abstinence. A chacham, a wise person, is one who recognizes his needs and desires and channels his energies properly. A person cannot deny his emotions. This was part of the sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel. They really denied their aggression towards G-d and directed it to expressions of their own self-importance. Thus, these emotions sought satisfaction by the building of the tower. Through the means of architecture they satisfied their emotional needs.

Upon the arrival of the Messiah, civilization will appreciate the proper philosophical values and will guide their lives based upon wisdom. Only then will man recognize his aggressive nature and properly channel his energies, and subordinate his instinctual drives. Only in such a society can we experience true peace. ■

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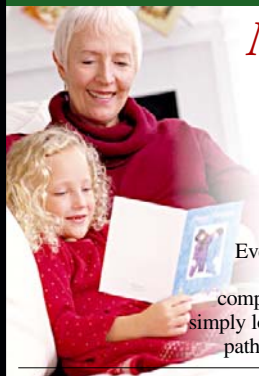
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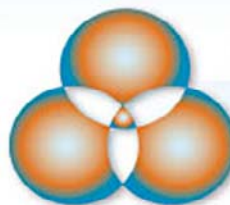
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