

# Parashat Noah:

## Noah in the Garden of Eden

### Chavruta:

Chavruta learning should focus upon the episode of Noah's drunkenness 9:18-29.

The text and classical commentaries should provide more than enough food for study and discussion!

### Shiur:

The story of the Flood is, at first glance, a story of destruction. The optimism, the positive mood, the excitement of the new world of Bereshit, is replaced by disappointment, as society descends into a chaotic violence that destroys society itself. God then decides to put an end to that world.

*"The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every thought of his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. The Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth man whom I created - man together with beasts, insects and the birds of the sky ...'" (6:5-7)*

The good that embodied creation (וירא אלו-הים כי טוב) has now become evil and wicked (רע) and hence the world is "blotted out."

### THE SYMMETRY OF THE FLOOD

On the one hand, we may then view the Flood as the conclusion, the sad epilogue to the Creation story. It closes the world created in seven days, and virtually obliterates it. It is the end of an era.

That is true. However the Flood has a different dynamic as well. From a literary vantage point, it exists as an independent literary structure, and this implies that the flood has its own story to tell. The flood is not simply the end of something. It is also the beginning of something. This may be seen illustrated by a simple number exercise – a study in symmetry of numbers.

- A1 7:10. *And it came to pass after the **seven days**, that the flood waters were upon the earth.*
- B1 7:12 *And the rain was upon the earth for **forty days** and forty nights*
- C1 7:24 *And the water swirled upon the earth **a hundred and fifty days**.*
- D 8:1 ***And God remembered** Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a spirit to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.*
- C2 8:3 *And the waters receded off the earth more and more, and the water diminished at the end **of a hundred and fifty days***

B2 8:6 *And it came to pass at the end of **forty days**, that Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.*

A2 8:10 *And he waited again another **seven days**, and he again sent forth the dove from the ark. And the dove returned to him at eventide, and behold it had plucked an olive leaf in its mouth; so Noah knew that the water had abated from upon the earth.*

Here we see a structure of 7-40-150-150-40-7. What this tells me is that the Torah is deliberately seeing the Flood in a chiasmic manner; the advance of the waters and their retreat, the destruction and the revival, the punishment and the recovery. Far from the Flood being seen simply as the final note to the Creation of the world, we must also view it as the prologue, the foundation work of a new world.

### CHAPTER 8 AS CREATION

Some years ago, Rabbi Joshua Berman wrote an article<sup>1</sup> in Herzog College's Tanach journal, Megadim. There he argued that Chapter 8 – the recovery of the flood and the subsiding of the waters - is more than a rebuilding. He argued that chapter 8 was a veritable re-creation.

We can tabulate the "evidence."

Day	Bereshit Chapter 8	Bereshit Chapter 1
1	8:1 and <b>God caused a spirit</b> to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.	and the <b>spirit of God</b> was hovering over the face of the water.
2	8:2 And the <b>springs of the deep</b> were closed, and the windows of the heavens, and the <b>rain from the heavens</b> was withheld.	God made the expanse and it separated between the water that was below the expanse and the water that was above the expanse,
3	8:5, 11 the <b>mountain peaks appeared</b> ...the dove returned ... an <b>olive leaf</b> in its mouth	God said, "Let the water ... gather into one place, and <b>let the dry land appear</b> ...Let the earth sprout vegetation ... and <b>fruit trees</b> "
4	8:11 seven <b>days</b> ... <b>evening</b>	And God made the two great luminaries: the great luminary to rule the <b>day</b> and the lesser luminary to rule the <b>night</b> , and the stars.
5	8:7 he sent forth the raven, and it went out, back and forth	let <b>birds</b> fly over the earth

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.herzog.ac.il/main/megadim/9br.html>

6	8:17 Every living thing that is with you of all <b>flesh, of fowl, and of animals and of all the creeping things</b> that creep on the earth, bring out with you, and they shall swarm upon the earth, and they shall be fruitful and multiply upon the earth	"Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind, <b>cattle and creeping things and the beasts</b> of the earth according to their kind
	Ch.9 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and He said to them: " <b>Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.</b> 2. <b>And your fear and your dread shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the fowl of the heaven; upon everything that creeps upon the ground and upon all the fish of the sea,</b> [for] they have been given into your hand[s]. 3. <b>Every moving thing that lives shall be yours to eat;</b> like the green vegetation, I have given you everything. 6. ...for He made Man in <u>His image</u> ....	And God created man in <u>His image</u> ; in the image of God. ... God said to them, " <b>Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth</b> and subdue it, and <b>rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the sky and over all the beasts that tread upon the earth.</b> " 29. And God said, "Behold, I have given you every seed bearing herb, which is upon the surface of the entire earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit; <b>it will be yours for food.</b>

As the Flood waters subside it is not simply that the old world is revealed. No! A new world is created! The text of ch.8 follows almost precisely the order of the creation in Bereshit ch.1!

First we have the SPIRIT OF GOD HOVERING upon the water – just like on Day 1 of Creation. Next, the floodwaters ABOVE and BELOW are stopped, a clear parallel to the division of waters on Day 2 creating a non-water space in between. DAY 3 is the exposure of dry land and the creation of plants, represented here by the finding of dry land and the olive branch. Day 4 is more complicated. Day 4 is the creation of luminaries – sun and moon – to regulate time, as it says in Bereshit:

*And God said, "Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens, to separate between the day and between the night, and they shall be for signs and for appointed seasons and for days and years.*

Here too, God pronounces after the Mabul:

*"So long as the earth endures, Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, **day and night shall not cease.**" (8:22)*

Clearly, this pronouncement informs us that time stopped in some way during the flood. No seasons existed, and it would appear that even night and day were suspended in some manner during the flood period. And hence, Noah's understanding that the dove has to be sent after 7 days clearly indicates that the days and nights, the regulation of time via the luminaries of Day 4, have been resumed. Day 5 is reflected in the birds – the raven and dove – creations of day 5 now released to their habitat. And day 6 is the releasing of the animals – all defined using their chapter 1 language – to the wild from the restriction of the Teivah, the Ark.

The pinnacle of this entire structure however, comes when Noah is addressed by God who instructs him in a manner that is parallel, if not identical, to the original commands<sup>2</sup> to Adam as seen in ch.1. Here we have "be fruitful and multiply"; we have the information as to the food that is at Noah's disposal etc.

It is clear from all of this that this is not simply the end of the flood, but very deliberately, very clearly stated, this is a NEW CREATION! This is the Bereshit of a new world. In this world, God accepts that "the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth," and he seeks despite that reality to establish a covenant with Man, with Noah, promising to continue the world indefinitely. As Noah emerges from the Teiva, God expresses his confidence and faith in Mankind!

#### NOACH GETS DRUNK

And now, I would like to turn our attention to a significant parallel which I have certain questions about and which needs further thought and attention. We should look at the Parsha which comes AFTER the flood.

*And Noah, the Man of the Earth, planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took the garment, and they placed [it] on both of their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and they covered their father's nakedness... Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his small son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren..." And Noah lived after the Flood, three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. (9:22-29)*

This story has always puzzled me. What exactly does it contribute to the story? What does it say about Noah as a person? Did Noah intend to get drunk or was it an accident? Why is Cham's sin so severe<sup>3</sup> as to warrant an eternal curse? Why is this story the final story that we are to witness regarding Noah?

But suddenly after understanding that we have a process of Destruction and ReCreation, I had a new thought in reading this chapter. Let me explain:

#### NOACH IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Here we might suggest a fascinating parallel. In the "first" story of creation:

Ch.1 was the story of the Creation.

Chapter 2 described Gan Eden,

Chapter 3 the sin of Gan Eden and the punishment.

Now, here:

<sup>2</sup> See the VBM shiurim which discuss the parallel in detail. Rav Yoni Grossman <http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.58/02noach.htm> and Rav Tamir Granot: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha66/02-66noach.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Chazal describe Cham as sexually assaulting Noah in some manner – see Rashi. The Ramban, Abarbanel and others take the approach that he simply saw his father naked and mocked him for it. This is worthy of thorough analysis and we shall leave it for a different time.

Chapter 8-9 is the NEW creation. So our story is a **parallel** to Gan Eden. Note the following parallels between the Gan Eden story and Noach's vineyard:

- The text states that Noach plants a vineyard. This deliberate emphasis upon planting, and the formation of a garden of sorts finds its parallel in the Garden of Eden whose planting is similarly expressed and emphasized: "And God planted a Garden in Eden." (2:8)
- Noah eats from the fruit of his garden. By eating from the fruit, his consciousness is altered.
- Noach is referred to as *Ish Adama* . *Adama* reflecting *Adam*.
- He rolls naked in his tent, reflecting the nakedness of Adam prior to the Sin. Moreover, his drunken state allows him not to be ashamed (at the time at least!)
- The result of the parsha is that a Curse is issued.

I believe that this connection is reinforced by the fact that Chazal go so far as to suggest that Noach actually ate from the self-same vine as Adam!<sup>4</sup>

So we have a parallel. But what could it mean?

## TEMPTATION

The Ramban writes:

*"The episode with Noach and the wine is written as a warning more severe than the parsha of the Nazir. We see here that even the "perfect Tzaddik (6:9) whose righteousness saved all humanity, even he, was induced to sin by wine, leading him to a point of absolute humiliation and the curse of his offspring."*

The Talmud repeatedly recalls this episode as a warning to the curses of wine drinking and drunkenness.

*"There is nothing that brings woe to Man more than wine" (Brachot 40a)<sup>5</sup>*

### פרקי דר' אליעזר פרק כ"ג

"מצאה נח גבן שגרשה ויצאה מגן עדן ואשכולותיה עמה נטל מפירותיה ואכל וחמד אותה בלבו ונטע ממנו כרם בארץ. בו ביום נשתגשו פרותיה...שתה ממנו יין ונתגל בתוך האוהל..."

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ע עמוד א ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם אמר רב חסדא אמר רב עוקבא, ואמרי לה מר עוקבא אמר רבי זכאי: אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לנח: נח, לא היה לך ללמוד מאדם הראשון, שלא גרם לו אלא יין. כמאן דאמר אותו אילן שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון גפן היה.

### תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מ עמוד א

יידתניא אילן שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון, רבי מאיר אומר: גפן היה, שאין לך דבר שמביא יללה על האדם אלא יין, שנאמר: +בראשית ט' וישת מן היין וישכר

<sup>5</sup> See the other sources in the above note 4, and also this interesting Midrash: סנהדרין דף ע עמוד א

דריש עובר גלילאה: שלש עשרה וי"ן נאמר ביין +בראשית ט' ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך האלו וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחוץ ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה וישימו על שכם שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם וגו' וייקף נח מיינו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן.

Here the Midrash sees 13 verbs each starting with the letter "Vav" or the phonetic sound "Va" and expressing the sound "Vay" or "Woe!" – a sound of lament and mourning. This Midrash exemplifies Chazal's sensitivity to the resonance of sound in Torah reading as the Midrash sees the repeated "Va" sound as forming a poetic refrain warning the reader of the devastating effects of wine. The **Ktav VeHakabbala** has a different reading of these multiple verbs. He states that any place in which there is verb after verb indicates speed, a quick succession. Likewise, the list of verbs here indicates the speed at which wine intoxicates.

If there is a parallel with Gan Eden, then our starting point is that of the seductive tempting quality of wine. The mind-altering qualities of wine are reminiscent of the desire of Adam and Eve for a different state of mind. Interestingly in Gan Eden the snake seduces man to eat from the fruit. Here, the seduction of the snake is supplanted here by the seduction of the fruit itself! Maybe we are being told here that even in the New World, there are temptations. Man should beware.

But there is something here, in addition, about the effects of succumbing to temptation. Maybe the story adds that in this post-Flood world, God will not eject us from the garden. God will not strike us with lightning nor bring another Flood to punish us. However, there are substances and actions which if abused may bring our own debasement. God has promised not to "curse the ground because of man" but we can generate our own curse if we succumb to physical temptations.<sup>6</sup>

## ESCAPISM

Here is one possible approach. The Abarbanel says the following:

*"Before the Flood there were vines for eating, but not vineyards with rows upon rows of vines for wine production. Noach took saplings that he had kept on the Ark, planting them in rows to make wine. Maybe this is due to the fact that he gave up on life after the Flood, desiring to drink wine rather than water (reminiscent of the flood waters) so that he would never see water again!"*

The wine then is then a reaction to the Flood. It is an act of escapism Rav Yitzchak Blau writes:

*"According to one midrash (Bereishit Rabba 34:6), Noach incredulously asks "Should I go out and propagate the world only to see it destroyed?" Hashem needs to reassure Noach and convince Noach to emerge and once again begin the building of a world. ... Noach's descent to the bottle reflects the response of escapism. When a person can not face the overwhelming ugliness about, he can always take refuge in a variety of mind numbing sedatives."*

The deafening silence of a world uninhabited haunts Noach. He cannot come to terms with the fact that other than his family, everyone is dead, and he is the lone survivor. And in this parsha then, Noach becomes the anti-hero of the story. Rather than being the Tzaddik who can save the world<sup>7</sup>, he turns face against the world, refusing to further its progress, abandoning the world-building that awaits.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> An approach somewhat in this direction maybe found in Devora Steinmetz: "Vineyard, Farm and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History." Journal of Biblical Literature 113/2 (1194) pgs.193-207.

<sup>7</sup> See the powerful comments of the Meshekh Chochma on these verses.

<sup>8</sup> Chazal suggest that Cham castrated Noach! Part of this explanation is due to the fact that apparently, Noach had no further children (and compare 9:29 to 10:1 and also to all the similar lines in ch.5 where the death of a person is always associated with the phrase 'And he fathered sons and daughters.') This despite Gods clear instruction of "be fruitful and multiply." But the inner meaning of castration is the refusal to even consider further procreation. With this imagery Chazal are expressing Noach's post-flood persona as unable to contribute to the New World, as a paradigm of deliberate impotence.

But how might this relate to Gan Eden? On the one hand, we could propose that Noach's escapism is the cardinal sin of that generation. However, a learned friend once suggested to me a more radical thought that follows this line of thinking. Noach rolls about **naked** – just like Adam and Eve - in the **garden** because he wants **to return** to Gan Eden. He desires to recreate the old world where there was no sin, to return to a pre-sin state. He tries to replant Gan Eden, and he thrusts himself into a state of mind where he is drunk; where rather than eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he has an absence of knowledge! Of course, it didn't work! The text states that, "**he knew** what his younger son had done to him." He does have knowledge. He cannot return. Indeed it is his son, Cham, who mocks his father's nakedness, as if to say: "Dad, you cannot live in a virtual reality. You are trying to rebuild the past. Face the future!" But of course, in this sad image, Noach is incapable of facing the future.

#### THE EXILE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

This Noach-Gan Eden parallel is interesting. I am certain that this shiur has not exhausted the possible angles here. Maybe you will come up with a new avenue of understanding here.

Interestingly, the Midrash Rabba sees this entire story on a far broader canvas<sup>9</sup>. The Midrash sees the word "Vayitgal" and hears intonations of the word "Galut," Exile. The Midrash makes a fascinating statement referring to the Jewish Exile of the First Temple period. Using parallel verses from Amos and Yishayahu, the Midrash connects the Noach story to the story of Am Yisrael:

*"Noah caused exile for himself and for future generations!  
The ten tribes were exiled due to wine...Yehudah and  
Binyamin were exiled because of wine." (BR 36:4)*

This Midrash again reinforces our parallel here. Noach's story is framed as a narrative of Exile, much like Gan Eden. The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) takes this Midrash and says that just like wine dulls the senses, Am Yisrael in their indulgent lifestyle eclipsed God. We were drunk, and lost sense of the life's genuine priorities. We were given a chance of Gan Eden. We sinned and were ejected.

Yes! Like Noach, the Jewish nation experienced destruction and Exile. But did the Jewish nation abandon life after exile? No! In contrast to Noach, we witnessed destruction and tragedy and yet as a nation we faced up to life, always building and planting. Rather than trying to create illusory realities, the Jewish people built shuls, wrote the Talmud, practiced Chessed and always hoped and dreamed to return from Exile back to the Eden of the Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom!

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<sup>9</sup> The sons of Noach are seen in this broader meta-Historic reading as references to Cyrus and Persia.