



JUDGING PEOPLE THE RIGHT WAY

When are we to say the truth about people's behavior? And what is the connection to our soul?

A powerful lesson from Noach, Moshe, and Rashi

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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This week's Torah reading tells us how G-d destroyed the world with a flood and began rebuilding it anew with Noah and his family (Source 1). Thousands of years later, when G-d tells Moses that He wishes to erase the Jewish people and start anew with Moses, Moses beseeches G-d to forgive them, telling G-d that if He won't, He should take Moses' life too. (Source 2)

The Zohar quotes Rabbi Yitzchak, who viewed Noah in a negative light because he didn't attempt to save the people of his generation, while Rabbi Yehuda, more generously, understands that Noah was not able to do so. (Source 3)

The Rebbe cites the explanation of his father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, that the reason one sage views this story negatively and another views it positively, is rooted in their souls, which originate in the attributes of kindness and severity, respectively. This is similar to the words of the Tanya, that the legal rulings of the Mishnaic and Talmudic sages are influenced by the source of their souls. (Source 4)

Not satisfied with his father's explanation, the Rebbe poses the question: Why judge Noah negatively at all? Shouldn't we judge everyone positively? Moreover, the Torah avoids speaking negatively even of non-kosher animals, stating "an animal that is not pure." (Source 5). Certainly this applies to Noah as well!

B. The Negative is a Positive.....13

There's a well known explanation that when it comes to a practical ruling, one must be explicit and clear. Only when repeating a story or anecdote with no practical ramifications should we be careful to use softer, less harsh language.

If Noah acted improperly, we must say so explicitly, so that future generations can learn the lesson. In fact, by future generations learning a lesson from Noah, Noah has his rectification, making this ultimately a statement for Noah's benefit.

This recalls the story of the funerals of Moses and Aaron. Regarding Moses, the Torah says: "The sons of Israel mourned Moses," meaning that the men alone mourned. Regarding Aaron, however, due to his pursuit of peace and efforts to restore married couples' harmony, the verse says that "the entire House of Israel," meaning both men and women, mourned for him. (Sources 6-7)

Even if Aaron excelled in the pursuit of peace, and was thus mourned more, why does the Torah allude to this while speaking about Moses' passing? Shouldn't that be the time to focus on praising Moses, and not the opposite?

The Rebbe explains that Moses himself wanted the Torah to emphasize this idea, to teach the Jews that their love for their fellow Jews should follow Aaron's example.

C. Rashi and Kabbalah (Optional).....17

The idea of interpreting a story or statement positively or negatively appears both in Rashi's commentary on the Torah and in the Zohar, illustrating the special relationship between Rashi and the Zohar.

This connection appears again: When the Torah describes the flood, it uses the word "rain" and the word "flood" (Source 8). Rashi explains that this alludes to G-d "bringing the rain with mercy, so that if they repent, it would be a rain of blessing, if not it would become a flood" (Source 9.) The source of this commentary is not in the Talmud nor the Midrash, but in the Zohar. This emphasizes the unity of all parts of the Torah, and that Rashi also contains the "wonders" of the Kabbalistic teachings.

This connection is also demonstrated by Rashi's life, as in the story of how his mother was miraculously saved in a Worms alleyway while pregnant with Rashi and a carriage was about to run her over. An alcove miraculously appeared in the wall, giving her shelter and saving her.

D. Always Strive for More.....20

The lesson:

Life is like climbing a ladder. Each day one is higher than the day before, but lower than we can be tomorrow. A Jew must always feel that their standing today is "negative" relative to what their true potential is. When we feel that way, we can overcome that negativity and climb higher.

Introduction

Two of the most famous characters in Jewish history deal with similar situations in very different ways, and both received veiled criticism - which in fact helped them.

השיעור לפרשת נח

משיחת ש"פ נח, ה'תשמ"ג
הנחה בלתי מוגה.
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ג חלק א' ע' 436 ואילך.

(לשלימות העניין, ראה לקוטי שיחות חלק כ"ה,
פרשת נח שיחה א', שם חלק כ"ד, פרשת ברכה)

A. Positively or Negatively?

The reading of Noah, the second Parshah in the book of Genesis, retells the story of the great flood that destroyed the world. The Torah describes the moral corruption of the generation of the flood, and as a result, G-d decided to bring a flood to wipe them out and begin a new civilization founded on justice and ethics.

Noah, called a “righteous man” in the Torah, was commanded to build an ark and bring aboard his family and specimens of the entire animal kingdom, as well as food for them. Noah faithfully carried out his task, and upon boarding the ark with his entourage, it began to rain. The rain quickly turned into a flood which left nothing of the past. For about a year, Noah and his company remain in the ark until the waters completely receded. Now the world was purer than before the flood, and G-d instructed Noah to leave the ark and start life anew.

Noah, a survivor of the flood and the leader of the world after the flood, is the subject of our class. Are we all in agreement that Noah was perfectly righteous or is he not free from criticism?

Source 1 Genesis, 6:13-14; 17-19; 21-22

G-d's Command to Noah:

Student's
pg. 3

G-d said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth has become full of robbery because of them, and I am destroying them from the earth.

Make for yourself an ark from gopher wood. You should make the ark with compartments, and you should coat it both inside and outside with tar.

I am hereby bringing the flood waters upon the earth, to destroy all living beings under the heavens. All that is upon the earth will perish.

I will set up My covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you and your sons, and your wife and your sons' wives with you.

Of all living beings you should bring two of each into the ark to preserve alive with you; they shall be male and female.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ כָּל בְּשָׂר
כָּא לִפְנֵי כִי מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס
מִפְּגִיָּהֵם וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתֶם אֶת
הָאָרֶץ.

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי גִפְרִית
תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ
מִבִּיַּת וּמִחוּץ בַּכָּפֹר.

וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מְבִיא אֶת הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם
עַל הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחַת כָּל בְּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ
רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר
בָּאָרֶץ יָגוּעַ.

וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וּבְקֹאתְךָ אֶל
הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּנְשֵׁי
בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ.

וּמִכָּל הַחַי מִכָּל בְּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל
תְּבִיא אֵל הַתֵּבָה לְהַחֲלִית אִתְּךָ זָכָר
וּנְקֵבָה יְהִינּוּ.

As for you, take for yourself from all edible foods and gather it, and it shall be for you and for them to eat."

Noah's response:

Noah followed all that God had commanded him.

וְאַתָּה קַח לָךְ מִכָּל מַאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לָךְ וּלְהֵם לְאֹכְלָהּ.

וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים כִּן עָשָׂה.

Source 2 Exodus, 32:7-11; 13; 31-32

G-d's Suggestion to Moses:

Student's
pg. 3

G-d said to Moses: "Go descend, for your people that you have brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly.

They have quickly turned away from the path that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf! They have prostrated themselves before it, slaughtered sacrifices to it, and said: 'These are your gods, Israel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt.'

G-d said to Moses: "I have seen this nation and they are a stiff-necked nation.

Now leave Me alone, and My anger will be kindled against them so that I will annihilate them, and I will make you into a great nation."

וַיִּדְבַר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּךְ רֵד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הִעֲלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

סָרוּ מִהַר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲגֹל מִסֹּכָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֹו וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִעֲלִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רְאִיתִי אֵת הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עַם קָשֶׁה עֲרִף הוּא.

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּיחָה לִי וַיִּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלֵם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל.

Moses' Response:

Moses pleaded before G-d, and said: "Why, G-d, should Your anger be kindled against Your people whom You have brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand?

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your very Self, and to whom You said: 'I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and all this land which I said that I would give to your seed, they shall keep it as their possession forever.' "

וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה ה' יִחַרְרָה אַפְּךָ בְּעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה.

זָכַר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ וַתְּדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אַרְבָּה אֵת זַרְעֲכֶם כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֲתֵן לְזַרְעֲכֶם וְנָחֳלוּ לָעָלָם.

Moses returned to G-d and said: "Please! This nation has committed a grave sin. They have made themselves a god of gold.

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי חָטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה חֲטָאָה גְּדוּלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב.

Now, if You forgive their sin, [then good;] but if not, erase me now from Your book which You have written."

וַעֲתָה אִם תְּשָׂא חֲטָאתָם וְאִם אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ.

Source 3 Zohar, pg. 67b

Comparing the Responses of Noah and Moses

Student's
pg. 4

Let us examine the difference between Moses and the rest of the world. When G-d told Moses "Now leave Me alone ... I will make you into a great nation," Moses immediately responded, "Shall I leave the Jews to their fate for my own sake? The Jews will say I abandoned them like Noah."

Because G-d told Noah that He would rescue him in the ark, along with his family, Noah did not ask G-d to have mercy and spare the world from being destroyed. This is why it is known as "Noah's Flood."

Moses said "The people of the world will say that I killed them because G-d promised He would make me into a great nation. I would rather die than the Jews be annihilated." Moses beseeched G-d for mercy for them and for the world.

He did not give up until he offered his own life, and then G-d forgave them. Noah did not do so, he was content with personally being saved, and he abandoned the world. . . . Moses risked his life for the Jewish people.

Rabbi Yehudah said: Although Noah was righteous, he wasn't worthy enough for G-d to spare the entire world on his account.

בֹּא רְאֵה מַה בֵּין מֹשֶׁה לְשָׂרָר בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם. בְּשִׁעָה שְׂאָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה וַעֲתָה הִנִּיחָה לִי וְגו', וְאָעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גְּדוֹל וְגו' – מִיָּד אָמַר מֹשֶׁה, וְכִי אֶעֱזֹב דֵּינָם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשִׁבְלִי? כָּעֵת יֵאמְרוּ כָּל אוֹתָם בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם שְׂאֲנִי הִרְגַּתִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמוֹ שִׁעֲשֶׂה נַח.

שְׂכִינּוֹן שְׂאָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שִׁיַּעֲזִיל אוֹתוֹ בְּתַבָּה, שְׂכַתוֹב וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מְבִיא אֶת הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם וְגו', וְכַתוּב וּמַחֲיִיתִי אֶת כָּל הַיְקוּמִים אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מְקִים אֶת בְּרִיתִי וְגו' וּבָאתָ אֶל הַתַּבָּה – כִּינּוֹן שְׂאָמַר לוֹ שִׁיַּנְצִיל הוּא וּבְנָיו, לֹא בְקֶשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל הָעוֹלָם וְנִאֲכָדוּ. וּמִשׁוּם כֶּךָ נִקְרָאִים מִי הַמַּבּוּל עַל שְׁמוֹ, כְּמוֹ שְׂנִאָמַר כִּי מִי נַח זֹאת לִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מֵעַבְרִי מִי נַח.

אָמַר מֹשֶׁה, כָּעֵת יֵאמְרוּ בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם שְׂאֲנִי הִרְגַּתִּי אוֹתָם מִשׁוּם שְׂאָמַר לִי וְאָעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גְּדוֹל. כָּעֵת טוֹב לִי שְׂאָמוֹת וְלֹא יִשְׁמְדוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל. מִיָּד – וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהָיו. בְּקֶשׁ רַחֲמִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְעוֹרֵר רַחֲמִים עַל הָעוֹלָם.

וְלֹא עֲזַב אֶת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַד שְׂמָסַר עֲצָמוֹ לְמִיתָה, שְׂכַתוֹב וַעֲתָה אִם תְּשָׂא חֲטָאתָם וְאִם אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ. וְהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְחַל לָהֶם, שְׂכַתוֹב וַיִּנָּחֵם ה' עַל הָרָעָה וְגו'. וְנַח לֹא עָשָׂה כֵּן, אֲלֵא רָצָה לְהַנְצִיל וְעֲזַב אֶת כָּל הָעוֹלָם.... [וְהַכֵּל נִאָמַר עַל מֹשֶׁה] מִשׁוּם שְׂמָסַר עֲצָמוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה, אַף עַל גַּב שִׁצְדִּיק הָיָה נַח, אֵינּוּ כְּדָאֵי שְׂהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִגַּן עַל הָעוֹלָם בְּשִׁבְלִיו.

Come and see: Moses didn't ask in his own merit but in the merit of the Patriarchs, but Noah had nobody on whose merit he could call like Moses had.

Rabbi Yitzchak said: Nevertheless, because G-d made a covenant with Noah, he should have asked for mercy. He should have brought the offering—that he sacrificed after the flood—before the flood. Perhaps that would have placated G-d.

Rabbi Yehudah said: “What was Noah to do? The evil people of the world incited G-d and he should bring a sacrifice? Noah was afraid for himself, he did not want to meet the fate of the evildoers whose deeds he saw constantly enraging G-d.

בא ראה, משה לא תלה הדבר בזכותו, אלא בזכות האבות הראשונים, אבל לנח לא היה לו במה שיתלה בזכות כמו משה.

אמר רבי יצחק, ועם כל זה, בין שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא והקמתי את בריתי אתך, היה לו לבקש עליהם רחמים. והקרבן שהקריב אחר כך – שיקריב אותו מקדם לזה, אולי ישפך הפעם מהעולם.

אמר רבי יהודה, מה היה לו לעשות, שהרי רשעי העולם היו מכעיסים לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, והוא קריב קרבן?! אלא ודאי נח פוחד על עצמו היה בשביל שלא יפגש בו המות בתוך רשעי העולם, שהיה רואה מעשיהם הרעים בכל יום ואיך מכעיסים לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא כל יום.

>> The Rebbe

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My father explains: “Rabbi Yehudah interprets Noah in a positive light and Rabbi Yitzchak interprets him in a negative light because each of them is expressing the perspective of their spiritual level. Rabbi Yehudah personifies the attribute of kindness, and therefore interprets Noah in a positive light, while Rabbi Yitzchak personifies the attribute of severity and interprets Noah in a negative light.”

ומבאר אאמו"ר: "ר' יהודא מהפך בזכות דנת, ור' יצחק בהיפך, שמהפך בחובתו, הוא כי כל אחד מהם מדבר כפי בחינתו ומדרגתו. ר' יהודא הוא בחינת חסד ור' יצחק הוא בחינת גבורה... לכן ר' יהודא מהפך בזכותו בפי מדתו מדת החסד, ור' יצחק מהפך בחובתו כפי מדתו מדת הגבורה."

The words of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the Rebbe's father, match the Alter Rebbe's words in his foreword to Tanya.

Source 4 Introduction to the Tanya

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Even in the case of the laws governing things prohibited and permitted, which have been revealed to us and to our children, we find differences of opinion among Mishnaic and Talmudic sages from one extreme to the other.

Yet "all are the words of the living G-d." The plural [of G-d's name] is used as a reference to the source of life for the souls of Israel, which are generally divided into three categories — right, left, and center, namely, kindness (chesed), severity (gevurah), and so on. The souls whose roots are in the attribute of kindness, are likewise inclined towards kindness in the leniency of their decisions, and so forth, as is known.

וְהִנֵּה, אַף בְּהִלְכוֹת אִיסוּר וְהִיתָר
הַנִּגְלוֹת לָנוּ וּלְבְנֵינוּ, מְצָאנוּ רְאִינֵנוּ
מִחִלּוֹקֵת תַּנְאִים וְאִמּוֹרָאִים מִן
הַקְּצָה אֶל הַקְּצָה מִמָּוֶשׁ,

וְאֵלוּ וְאֵלוּ דְבָרֵי אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים —
לְשׁוֹן רַבִּים — עַל שֵׁם מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים
לְנִשְׁמוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּחָלְקוֹת דְּרָךְ
כָּלֵל לְשִׁלְשָׁה קוּיִן, יְמִין וּשְׂמֹאל
וְאַמְצַע, שֶׁהֵם חֶסֶד וּגְבוּרָה וְכוּ',
וְנִשְׁמוֹת שְׂשׂוּרֵשׁוֹן מְמַדַּת חֶסֶד,
הַנִּהְיָתָן גַּם בֵּין לְהַטּוֹת כְּלַפֵּי חֶסֶד
— לְהַקְל כּוּי' בְּנוֹדָע.

The Alter Rebbe explains that in rulings of Jewish law where different sages had varying opinions, like Shammai and Hillel, they were guided by the root source of their souls. Those with souls originating in kindness viewed the world leniently, while those originating in severity were generally more stringent.

This is also what Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains. The reason Rabbi Yehudah viewed Noah more positively and Rabbi Yitzchak viewed him more negatively is a result of their souls' origins; one from kindness and the other from severity.

>> The Rebbe

Judging Favorably

The Rebbe isn't satisfied with his father's explanation, and continues to ask why Rabbi Yitzchak interprets Noah in a negative light. Even though his soul stems from the attribute of severity, this still doesn't justify his criticism.

Student's
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The matter is still difficult. The Torah's instruction to "judge every person favorably" is of course directed to every Jew, including those who represent the attribute of severity. How then could Rabbi Yitzchak interpret Noah in a negative light and not judge him favorably, as the Mishnah instructs?

Don't Speak Derogatorily

Moreover: the Torah doesn't even speak negatively about non-kosher animals.

Source 5 Talmud, Pesachim 3a

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Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Never let a derogatory word come out of your mouth, because the verse used eight extra letters to avoid saying something unclean, as it says: "From the pure animals and from the animals that are not pure."

אך יש להבין: הוראה התורה! "והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות" מכוונת, כמובן, לכל יהודי, אפילו למי ש"מדתו מדת הגבורה" - כיצד ייתכן שרבי יצחק היה מהפך בחובתו של נח, ולא דן אותו לכף זכות, כציווי המשנה?²

ויתירה מזו: יש כלל³ שאפילו בגנות בהמה טמאה לא דיבר הכתוב.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: לְעוֹלָם אַל יוֹצֵיא אָדָם דְּבַר מְגוּנָה מִפִּי, שֶׁהָרִי עָקָם הַכָּתוּב שְׁמוּנָה אוֹתִיּוֹת, וְלֹא הוֹצֵיא דְבַר מְגוּנָה מִפִּי. שְׁנַאֲמַר: "מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנָה טְהוֹרָה".

The Talmud wants us to adopt the Torah's style of clean and positive language.

G-d commanded Noah to bring different animals into the ark. When the verse specifies that all animals were brought in, it mentions the pure animals and "from the animals that are not pure." Every letter in the Torah is precise, and the Torah does not use extra words or letters for poetic language. The Torah therefore should have written more concisely and said "from the impure animals." Instead of thirteen letters, it could have written it in five letters, saving eight letters.

This teaches us proper behavior - to always prefer positive, clean speech.

>> The Rebbe

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If the Torah is careful not to write a negative word about an animal, how much more so should this apply to Noah, who "was a righteous man." How then can it be that Rabbi Yitzchak interprets him in a negative light?

והרי הדברים קל וחומר: אם בנוגע לבהמה משתדלים שלא לכתוב דבר מגונה, על אחת כמה וכמה בנוגע ל"נח איש צדיק"! ואם כן, כיצד יתכן שר' יצחק מהפך בחובתו דוקא!?

3. ב"ב קכ"ג, א (מסיים: בגנות צדיקים דבר הכתוב (בתמי)).

1. אבות פ"א מ"ו.
2. קטע זה, מהליקוט המוגה חכ"ה נח א'.

Noah Was a Righteous Man In His Generation

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We also need to understand Rashi's commentary on the words "perfect in his generations." Rashi comments: "Some of our sages interpret the specification "in his generations" positively, arguing that had Noah lived in a righteous era he would have been even more righteous. Other sages interpret this specification negatively, arguing that Noah was only righteous relative to his generation, but had he lived in the generation of Abraham he wouldn't have been considered great at all."

ועל דרך זה צריך להבין בפירוש רש"י על הפסוק⁴ "תמים היה בדרתיו", "יש מרבותינו דורשים אותו לשבח, כל שכן אלו היה בדור צדיקים היה צדיק יותר; ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי, לפי דורו היה צדיק ואלו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב כלום."

*The Torah added an apparently extraneous word, "in his generations," and the Sages are discussing its meaning. One opinion interprets this positively, that Noah was righteous **even** in a wicked era, and had he lived in a righteous era he would be all the greater. A second opinion understands it negatively, that Noah is termed righteous **only** relative to his generation, but in a better generation he wouldn't have been anything notable.*

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Considering that it is possible to interpret Noah in a positive light, how can it be that some great sages chose to interpret him specifically in a negative light?

ולכאורה: מאחר שישנה אפשרות לדרוש זאת לשבח, כיצד יתכן שגדולי ישראל ירצו לפרש זאת לגנאי דוקא!?

We also need to understand the practical lesson we can derive from this for our personal divine service.

גם צריך להבין: מהו הלימוד וההוראה מענין זה בנוגע לעבודת האדם.

Had the topic in question been of practical halachic relevance we could understand how some sages could feel compelled to interpret it in a severe manner. But here we are discussing an exposition of a historical character, which has no practical ramifications. Why then do some sages feel compelled to paint him in a negative light?

Life Lesson

Before we continue with the explanation, let us focus for a moment on the lesson the question itself teaches us. The Oral Torah is filled with debate and varying opinions. Here we have a Kabbalistic explanation for why some sages interpret the story in a way that portrays Noah negatively. The Rebbe, however, is not content with that. How can we say something negative about a person when the Torah refrains from doing so even regarding animals?

The question itself is a lesson for us in how careful we must be to judge others favorably and speak respectfully about other people.

B. The Negative is a Positive

>> The Rebbe

In Law, Clarity Is Paramount

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The explanation: There is a well-known question asked regarding the rule that the Torah adds unneeded words in order to avoid stating something derogatory. Considering this rule, why do we find that the Torah uses the word "impure" many times, and not just terms such as "the animal that isn't pure"?

The answer is that when discussing practical law it is imperative to use clear and precise language, to avoid any possibility for misunderstanding. Therefore, in legal contexts the Torah states clearly that certain things are impure, forbidden, etc. However, when the context is a story that doesn't have practical ramifications, the Torah uses clean language and avoids stating anything derogatory.

The Ramifications of Noah's conduct

This principle can explain our case. If there is something negative about Noah's conduct, it can't be covered up in order to focus solely on the positive. Relating it has practical importance, to caution us not to take an example from such conduct. There's no choice but to point out the negative aspect in order to teach us not to emulate it.

והביאור: בנוגע לזהירות שלא להוציא דבר מגונה מפיו, כפי שלמדים מזה ש"עקם הכתוב שמונה אותיות ולא הוציא דבר מגונה מפיו" - ידועה השאלה ששואלים בחדרים ובישיבות: הרי מצינו בתורה כמה פעמים שנאמר הלשון "טמא" וכיוצא בזה (ולא רק "הבהמה אשר איננה טהורה")!?

והביאור בזה: כאשר צריכים לומר דין הנוגע למעשה בפועל, יש לדייק ולומר את הדבר באופן ברור ומוחלט, כדי שלא יבואו לידי טעות, וכיוצא בזה, ולכן אומרים שדבר זה הוא אסור או טמא וכיוצא בזה. מה שאין כן, כאשר מדובר אודות סיפור וכיוצא בזה שאינו נוגע למעשה בפועל, אזי צריכים לדבר בלשון נקיה, ולהזהר שלא להוציא מפיו דבר מגונה.⁵

ועל דרך זה מובן בנוגע לעניננו: כאשר ישנו ענין בלתי רצוי - חובה או גנאי - בהנהגתו של נח - אי אפשר להעלים זאת ולדבר רק אודות השבח כו', מאחר שזהו ענין שנוגע למעשה בפועל - להזהיר שלא להתנהג כן, ולכן, אין ברירה אלא לומר שישנו ענין של גנאי שצריכים להזהר לא להתנהג כן.

5. לשלימות הענין יש לעיין בלקו"ש חלק י"א שיחה ב' לפרשת נח.

What was the negative aspect of Noah's conduct? The Zohar notes the difference between Noah and Moses: Moses prayed to G-d for mercy for sinners, and they were saved. Noah, by contrast, did not pray for the sinners of his generation, and that is why the flood is known by his name, "Noah's flood."

(The Zohar does explain that Moses beseeched G-d not in his own merit, but in the merit of the Patriarchs. Noah didn't have the Patriarchs to invoke, so what could he have done? But nevertheless, he should have tried asking for mercy in his own merit.)

Noah Wants to be Interpreted Negatively

Noah wants rectification for his failure to pray on behalf of the world. This rectification is achieved through the Torah relating this story and emphasizing that this conduct was incorrect, cautioning us not to emulate it. In other words, by interpreting Noah negatively we rectify his shortcoming, so on a deeper level this is actually good for Noah.

This is somewhat similar to the repentance process for a person who sinned and also caused the public to sin. Personal repentance can only atone for his personal sin, but not for causing others to sin. Rectification for causing others to sin is achieved by publicizing that so-and-so led the public astray. By warning others not to follow his example, his sin is rectified.

והביאור בזה: מבואר בזהר שהחילוק בין משה לנח הוא - שמשה בקש רחמים עליהם ועורר רחמים על העולם, מה שאין כן נח לא ביקש רחמים על העולם והם נאבדו, ולכן נקראים מי המבול על שמו.

(ואף על פי שמבואר בזהר, שמשה לא תלה זאת בזכותו, אלא בזכות האבות - כמו שכתוב "זכור לאברהם ליצחק ולישראל עבדיך גו'", ואילו נח לא היה לו במי לתלות, ולכן מה הוא כבר יכול היה לעשות?! אף על פי כן, הוא היה צריך לנסות לבקש רחמים בזכות עצמו.)

ומאחר שנח צריך תיקון על זה שהוא לא ביקש רחמים על העולם - הרי תיקון הענין נעשה על ידי זה שהתורה מספרת ומדגישה שהנהגתו של נח היא הנהגה שאינה רצויה, וצריכים להיזהר שלא להתנהג כן. כלומר: עצם הענין שמהפכים בחובתו של נח מהוה תיקון על חובתו, ולכן, ההפיכה בחובתו של נח היא - בפנימיות הענינים - דבר טוב גם עבור נח.

מעין דוגמא לדבר: כאשר החוטא ומחטיא את הרבים שב בתשובה, הנה על ידי התשובה ביכולתו לתקן רק מה שהוא חטא, ולא מה שהחטיא את הרבים. ואילו התיקון על זה שהחטיא את הרבים הוא - על ידי זה שמפרסמים ומכריזים שפלוגי החטיא את הרבים, כלומר, שתיקון הדבר נעשה על ידי האזהרה שלא יתנהגו כמותו חס ושלום.

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Ultimately, Noah wants us to interpret his conduct negatively and state that he didn't act properly—by failing to pray on behalf of his fellow people—because this rectifies his error.

ועל פי זה מובן שרצונו של נח שיהפכו בחובתו, ויכתבו בתורה שצריכים להזהר שלא להתנהג כמותו (בזה שהוא לא ביקש רחמים על העולם) - כי על ידי זה נפעל תיקון הדבר.

Moses Wants Us to Be Like Aaron

This is similar to what we once explained about the different forms of love for their fellow Jews that Moses and Aaron expressed. When Moses died the Torah tells us that the men cried and mourned his death, but when Aaron died the women mourned as well. This was because Aaron excelled in restoring peace and harmony for married couples.

ועל דרך המדובר פעם אודות החילוק שבין משה ואהרן בנוגע להנהגה של אהבת ישראל, שאצל משה נאמר "ויבכו בני ישראל את משה - הזכרים", "אבל באהרן, מתוך שהיה רודף שלום ונתן שלום בין איש לאשתו ובין אשה לבעלה, נאמר כל בית ישראל, זכרים ונקבות".

The Rebbe references his address from Simchat Torah of the previous year, in which he discussed the difference between the mourning for Moses and the mourning for Aaron.

Source 6 Deuteronomy 34:8

Regarding Moses' passing, the Torah says:

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The sons of Israel mourned Moses' passing in the plains of Moab for thirty days and then they concluded the days of mourning for Moses.

וַיִּבְכוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וַיִּתְּמוּ יָמָיו בְּכִי אֶבֶל מֹשֶׁה.

The sages contrast this with the mourning for Aaron, noting the different language:

Source 7 Numbers 20:29

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The whole congregation saw that Aaron had passed, and the **entire house** of Israel mourned for Aaron for thirty days.

וַיֵּרְאוּ כָּל הָעֵדָה כִּי גִוַע אֶהְרֹן וַיִּבְכוּ אֶת אֶהְרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Rashi on Deuteronomy explains:

"The **sons** of Israel" mourned Moses - this means the men alone. But regarding Aaron, due to his pursuit of peace and efforts to restore harmony between friends and between husband and wife, the verse says that "the entire House of Israel" mourned him, meaning both men and women.

"בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" - הַזְּכָרִים אֶבֶל בְּאֶהְרֹן מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהָיָה רוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם וְנֹתֵן שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּבֵין אִשָּׁה לְבַעְלָהּ נֶאֱמַר כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל זְכָרִים וְנִקְבוֹת.

From the difference in language, Rashi understands that after the passing of Aaron all of Israel mourned, women and men, but for Moses only the men really mourned. Rashi explains that this is because Aaron excelled in making peace between married couples.

Even if Aaron pursued peace and was mourned by the entire Jewish people, why did the Torah need to allude to this while speaking of Moses' passing? Was this the appropriate time to make this point?

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This matter is stated and emphasized in the Torah portion that discusses Moses' greatness because Moses himself desires that the Torah should emphasize this distinction, so that all Jews should know that love for their fellow Jews should be expressed the way that Aaron expressed it.

Moses himself wants us to learn from Aaron's love for fellow Jews and not from his own conduct. It benefits Moses when we do so.

In other words, if we only praise Noah we leave a shortcoming of his in place. But when we also highlight something undesirable about his conduct—with the intention of cautioning against it—we rectify it, thereby transforming Noah to be fully meritorious and praiseworthy.

ענין זה נאמר ומודגש בפרשה שבה מדובר אודות מעלתו של משה, לפי שמשה עצמו רוצה שהתורה תכתוב ותדגיש ענין זה, כדי שבני ישראל ידעו שהנהגה בענין אהבת ישראל צריכה להיות בדוגמת הנהגתו של אהרן.

בסגנון אחר: כאשר מדברים רק אודות שבחו וזכותו של נח - נשאר אצלו ענין של גנאי וחובה, מה שאין כן כאשר מדברים גם אודות הגנאי והחובה של נח, להזהר שלא להתנהג כן - מתקנים את הדבר, ואז נשאר אצלו רק ענין של שבח וזכות.

C. Rashi and Kabbalah (Optional)

>> The Rebbe

Rashi and The Zohar

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As mentioned, Rashi cites this idea at the beginning of our Torah portion, “some of our Sages interpret it positively, and others interpret it negatively.” This parallels the two explanations given in the Zohar, thus highlighting the connection between Rashi’s commentary and the Zohar.

כאמור לעיל - מובא ענין זה גם בפירוש רש"י על התורה (תחילת פרשתנו): "יש מרבתינו דורשים אותו לשבח... ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי" - דוגמת שני הפירושים שבדברי הזהר (לזכותו או לחובתו). ובזה רואים את הקשר המיוחד שבין הזהר ופירוש רש"י - שאותו ענין המובא בזהר מובא גם בפירוש רש"י.

Source 8 Genesis 7:12

When the Torah describes the flood, it uses two different words: “Rain” and “flood.” Why?

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The rain was upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.

וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וָאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה.

Rashi:

The rain was upon the earth: Following this, it says “flood.” This means that when it began raining it was with mercy, so if they would repent, it would be rains of blessing. When they failed to repent it became a flood.

וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל הָאָרֶץ. וְלִהְיוֹן הוּא אוֹמֵר וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל? אֵלֶּיךָ כְּשֶׁהוֹרִידֵן הוֹרִידֵן בְּרַחֲמִים, שְׂאֵם יַחְזְרוּ יִהְיוּ גְשָׁמֵי בְרָכָה; כְּשֶׁלֹּא חָזְרוּ — הָיוּ לְמַבּוּל.

In general, Rashi cites the Midrash and Talmud. However, when looking for the source of this Rashi, it is not in the Talmud or Midrash, but in the Zohar.

Source 9 Zohar Chadash, Noah 22a

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Rabbi Yitzchak said, come and see, when G-d brought the waters, He initially did so with mercy, to show the world that if they repent, it would be accepted. This is alluded to in the earlier verse “And the rain” while the later verse says “And the flood.” If they would have repented, it would have been rains of blessing, but because they didn’t, it became a flood.

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק, בֵּא וּרְאֵה, כְּשֶׁהוֹרִיד הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַמַּיִם, הוֹרִידֵם תְּחִלָּה בְּרַחֲמִים, כְּדִי לְהַרְאוֹת לְעוֹלָם, שְׂאֵם יִשׁוּבוּ וְקִבְּלֵם. מִשְׁמַע דְּכַתִּיב בְּתַחֲלָה "וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם", וְלִהְיוֹן הוּא אוֹמֵר "וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל", שְׂאֵם יַחְזְרוּ יִהְיוּ גְשָׁמֵי בְרָכָה, לֹא חָזְרוּ — הָיָה מַבּוּל.

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This connection is even clearer in an earlier comment of Rashi's, that the rain was initially calm, so that "if they would repent, it would be rains of blessing." The sole source for this comment is in the *Zohar Chadash* - it is not found in any other *midrashim* of the Sages.

This proves that it is erroneous to assert that Rashi's commentary only addresses the most literal meaning of the verses, and doesn't incorporate anything from the other forms of Torah interpretation. The truth is that Rashi's commentary also contains wondrous secrets, as the founder of Chabad, the Alter Rebbe, said that Rashi is "the wine of Torah."

Rashi's association with the deeper hidden aspects of Torah is also expressed in a number of miraculous stories about his life. This begins with a well-known story related about his birth: Once, while Rashi's mother was pregnant with him, she was walking down a narrow street and a carriage was heading towards her. The street was too narrow for the carriage to pass without harming her, and the wall miraculously bent inwards to accommodate her, thus saving both the mother and her child.

My father-in-law the Rebbe related that when he was in Worms, Rashi's city of birth, he saw the alcove in the wall that even the local non-Jews identify as the place where this story occurred.

ענין זה מודגש עוד יותר בפירוש רש"י לעיל, "ויהי הגשם גו' הורידן ברחמים שאם יחזרו יהיו גשמי ברכה" - כי המקור היחיד לדברי רש"י הוא בזהר חדש (כב, א), ומלבד דברי הזהר לא מצינו זאת בשאר מדרשי חז"ל.

זאת אומרת: שלא כדעת הטועים שפירוש רש"י הוא פשוטו של מקרא בלבד, ואין לזה שייכות כלל עם חלק הרמז וכו', אלא בפירוש רש"י ישנם גם "נפלאות", וכפתגם אדמו"ר הזקן שפירוש רש"י הוא "יינה של תורה".

והקשר של רש"י (ופירוש רש"י) עם כללות חלק הרמז והסוד שבתורה מודגש גם בכמה סיפורי מופתים וכו' הקשורים עם דברי ימי חייו של רש"י, ועד לסיפור הידוע שאירע עם אמו של רש"י בהיותה מעוברת (קודם לידת רש"י) - שבלכתה פעם ברחוב צר, באה לעומתה מרכבה, ובדרך הטבע לא היתה אפשרות שהמרכבה תחלוף והיא והעובר יישארו שלמים - נעשה שקע בקיר בגודל המתאים לאשה מעוברת, וכך ניצלו שניהם.

כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדמו"ר סיפר שבהיותו בעיר וורמייזא (עיר הולדתו של רש"י) - ראה את השקע בקיר שאודותיו מקובל סיפור הנ"ל (אפילו אצל אומות העולם).

D. Always Strive for More

>> The Rebbe

The Lesson

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There is a lesson we can all learn from the Zohar in regard to our Divine service.

We must know that regardless of how advanced our Divine service is, we can never be satisfied with our current state. We must constantly strive for more, knowing that our current state is “derogatory” relative to the higher level that stands beyond. Awareness of this “fault” will inspire us to overcome it and reach the higher level. But if we think only of the praiseworthiness of our current level we will get stuck on it, resting on a level that is “derogatory” relative to the level beyond it.

Our lives are like climbing a ladder. Every day is higher than the previous day, but lower than the next day.

It is all dependent on us. We can feel good about being more accomplished than yesterday and remain in our current state, or feel “negative” about our current state and wish to realize our full potential.

From these stories about Noah and Moses, we see that even these great men, even after their passing, were not satisfied with their accomplishments. They wanted the sages of following generations to know that more could be done.

Progressing in Torah Study

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An example from the field of Torah study: When a person has studied a particular topic 100 times, or even 101 times,

ההוראה מדברי הזהר - בנוגע לעבודת האדם:

יהודי צריך לדעת שככל שתהיה עבודתו באופן נעלה - אין לו להסתפק במעמדו ומצבו בהוה, אלא עליו להוסיף ולהתעלות לדרגה נעלית יותר, בידוע שמעמדו ומצבו בהוה נחשב לענין של “גנאי” ביחס לדרגה נעלית יותר. ולכן, כאשר יודע ומרגיש “גנאי” זה, הרי זה יפעל עליו לבטל את ה“גנאי” ולהגיע לדרגה נעלית יותר, מה שאין כן אם יחשוב רק אודות ה“שבח” שבמעמדו ומצבו בהוה, ישאר בדרגה זו בלבד, שהיא בבחינת “גנאי” לגבי הדרגה שלמעלה ממנה.

ולדוגמא - בלימוד התורה; גם כאשר למד ענין מסוים “מאה פעמים”, ויתירה מזו: “מאה פעמים ואחד”,

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they may believe that they have already achieved perfection in this regard. But such a person is nevertheless told that they need to progress further, and elevate themselves to an even higher level.

Inspiring Others

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The same is true regarding inspiring others. We can't suffice with our personal achievements and need to work to inspire others, and ultimately the entire world.

ואם כן - טוען הוא - הגיע כבר לתכלית השלימות של לימוד התורה, אף על פי כן, אומרים לו שעליו להוסיף בזה ולהתעלות לדרגה נעלית יותר.

ועל דרך זה מובנת ההוראה בנוגע להתעסקות והשפעה על הזולת - היינו, שאין להסתפק בעבודתו בנוגע לעצמו, אלא צריכים להשתדל להשפיע ולפעול גם על הזולת, ועד שפועלים על העולם כולו.

משיחת ש"פ נח, ה'תשמ"ג.
הנחה בלתי מוגה.
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ג חלק א' ע' 436 ואילך