



"...these (rely on) chariots and these on horses,
but we, in the name of God - our God will we mention."

King David: Psalm 20

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IN THIS ISSUE:

NOAH AND THE FLOOD	I, 2
ISRAEL IS OURS	I, 3
THE GIFT OF Tfila	I, 3
SUPERSTITION II	3
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	3

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Noah and the Generation of the Flood

Transcribed by students

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

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 chapter six verse eleven 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" throughout

(continued on page 2)

Israel Is Ours

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: From a purely religious perspective, what proof exists that Israel truly belongs to the children of Israel, son of Isaac, - and not the children of Ishmael?

Mesora: The Bible offers a 100% proof of Jewish ownership of Israel. Using the Bible as our proof, let us examine the passages:

Genesis, 12:5-7, "...and Abraham came to the land of Canaan. And Abraham traveled in the land until the place of Shechem, until the plains of Moreh, and the Canaanites were yet in the land. And God appeared to Abraham and said, 'to your seed I give this land', and he built there an altar to God who appeared to him."

Here, God promises the land to Abraham.

Genesis, 17:19-21, "And God said, 'but Sarah your wife will give birth to you a son, and you will call him Isaac, and I will sustain My treaty with him - an everlasting treaty - to his seed after him. And to Ishmael I have heard you, behold I bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him very much, twelve princes will he bear, and he will be given to be a great nation. But my treaty I will establish with Isaac, who Sarah will bear at this time next year.'"

Here we see that God selected only one of Abraham's children, Isaac, to receive the treaty of the land of Israel.

Genesis, 25:5-6, "And Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. And to the children of Abraham's concubines, Abraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from Isaac his son during his life eastward to the land of the east."

God clearly states in Genesis 17:21 that His treaty to give the land of Canaan is exclusively with Isaac and not with Ishmael. Even more, Genesis, 25:5-6 teaches that Abraham gave all he owned to Isaac.

This generation is not the first to

(continued on page 3)



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The Gift of Tfila

RIVKA OLENICK

"When a person merits becoming aware of the reality of the Almighty's existence, one will experience limitless joy." Chazon Ish (Emunah Ubitachon 1:9) Awareness of the reality of God through prayer is the most essential and the most elevating realization of tefila and which we continuously strive to maintain. Each time we are involved in tefila first we must recognize that we pray to the Creator of the World, the Master of the Universe, the One Who does take notice of our tefila. A clear understanding that one is standing before God is as important as understanding the meaning of the tefila. If we do not understand Who we are standing before then Who are we directing our tefila to? The Rambam says: "The true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived." If we imagine any kind of image that our mind associates or believes to be God that is actually avodah zara. It is man's nature to constantly absorb itself in the physical therefore it is crucial that do not attach anything physical to God. The Third of our Thirteen Principles of Faith states: "I believe with perfect faith that God does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all." When we apply this principle to prayer, it reinforces in our mind the idea that God is not physical. Our tefila also reinforces the idea that we rely completely on God, not man. Our awareness of God is absolutely essential to our tefila - meaning that our intention or the kavana of our tefila is meaningless if we are not cognizant of Who we pray to - Who is it that hears our prayers? One's kavana or one's concentration is what defines one's tefila, since this is the essence of tefila and the mitzvah of tefila requires kavana.

It is uplifting to know that one is serving God by the very act of standing before Him and with the proper intention, kavana, we ask that our tefila be heard. Knowing that each and every word that we say is heard trains us to be "truly involved" in our own tefila and brings a great sense of joy. We free our mind through our tefila and we attach our thoughts to God. After all, it is God Who created each of us, and it is God who gave us this profound commandment of prayer. We are all given the opportunity through prayer to "connect" with our mind and with our heart to God. Since God knows all our thoughts than certainly tefila is how we converse, and God hears. Even within our human limitations, the mitzvah of prayer can be extremely

(continued on page 3)

Noah and the Generation of the Flood

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(continued from page 1)

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 emanates from perisha me-arayos. 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 ha-behami, 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 man's 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. The prohibition against stealing logically makes sense. As the RAMBAN says it's a commandment which does not require a prophet to warn us against it 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 mitzvah which is not sichli 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. Also the adam ha'shalem, the harmonious man, whose entire energies are directed to chachma. 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 but yet, man still had not abandoned the intellectual. In fact man utilized his chachma in the pursuit of his desires.

However, man was doomed to extinction when chamas 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 even using his mind in the pursuit of his

physical pleasures. He was involved in chamas, total self destructive behavior. This is what the RAMBAN meant when he said that chamas sealed man's fate because it was a violation of a mitzvah sichli. 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. chamas epitomizes the state of the perfection of the nefesh ha-behami. 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 the state of chamas flourished and was fostered by man's initial domination by his sexual desires. It is when man abandons the intellectual repression of sexual promiscuity, will the instinctual appetites of man be cultivated and ultimately dominate 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 subjugates the

tzelem elokim to the whims of the physical. Chamas is a natural outgrowth of such a behavioral progression and condemns mankind to a worthless existence.

Noah however, did not fall prey to the corruption of the society. Although he was considered righteous, CHAZAL castigate him for not attempting to influence other people. Noah never tried to influence his fellow man to behave in a just fashion. This is bothersome, considering the fact that the Torah refers to Noah 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 respecting Noah. There are two types of righteous individuals. Abraham typifies the higher level. This is the just individual who lives in a corrupt society and seems to function therein. However, he is in reality living the life of a hermit. Thus Abraham was a ger toshav. In terms of his personal ideals they were foreign to the values of the society. He was a ger in this respect. However, he was a toshav, 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 can not 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. CHAZAL 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. 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 can not be held responsible for not helping others live the proper life if it would risk his own perfection. Thus Noah was a tzadik b-dorosav. ■

Page 2

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Israel Is Ours

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

accused of forcibly occupying Israel. An account dating back to approximately 350 BCE is recorded between the Ishmaelites and the children of Abraham's concubine Ketura, against the Jews, and before Alexander the Great. This historical account is located in the Talmud Sanhedrin, page 91a and reads:

"On one occasion, the Ishmaelites and the children of Ketura came to debate Israel in front of Alexander the Great saying, 'Israel belongs to both the Ishmaelites and the Jews, as it is written 'these are the children of Ishmael the son of Abraham, and it is also written, 'these are the children of Isaac the son of Abraham.' (The Ishmaelites intended to fully equate both children, Ishmael and Isaac). Upon hearing the accusation, a Jew, named Ben-Pesisa approached the Rabbis and said, 'allow me to debate the Ishmaelites. If they win, they will say they beat a nobody (thereby enabling a greater Jew to argue further), but if I win, they will say the Law of Moses defeated them'. The Rabbis gave Ben-Pesisa permission to debate the Ishmaelites.

Ben-Pesisa came before Alexander the Great and the Ishmaelites and said, 'from where do you derive your proof?' The Ishmaelites said, 'from the Torah. Ben-Pesisa said, 'I too will derive proof from nowhere but the Torah. He said, 'the Torah teaches, 'And Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. And to the children of Abraham's concubines, Abraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from Isaac his son during his life eastward to the land of the east.'

Ben-Pesisa concluded, 'If a father gives gifts to one of his sons in his lifetime, and then sends that son away from the other son, has the recipient of the gifts left to himself any claim?'

There is no further Talmudic debate on this topic. Sound reason reveals the Ishmaelites - and anyone for that matter - have no claim against the children of Isaac, the children of Israel. The land of Israel is 100% the possession of Israel. We might add that the Biblical borders define what the children of Israel own legitimately, not just limited politically defined borders. □

The Gift of Tfila

RIVKA OLENICK

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(continued from page 1)

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meaningful and brings peace of mind and tranquility. From anywhere in the world one can communicate their thoughts with the Master of the Universe since tefila is a metaphysical phenomenon.

In surrendering one's heart and mind entirely to prayer, it is important to prepare our thoughts and our feelings toward God. If you are home, designate a same, special place for tefila where there is quiet and no other distractions. Do everything so that you don't disturb yourself with your own needs, including being dressed decently. The book, Horeb by Samson Raphael Hirsch gives alot information regarding the guidelines of prayer, it is an excellent practical reference book for everyone. Tefila is serious, not sad. It can be an uplifting experience, instead of a burdensome obligation. There is no need to "rush" through each prayer, and there will no benefit to you if you do. Ask yourself: "how does tefila help me?" Since we know that God does not benefit from a person's tefila, it is obvious that tefila is for our benefit. So, doesn't it make sense to view tefila as an investment in one's perfection rather than a tiresome, boring obligation? Approach your tefila slowly and with an open mind and by concentrating on the ideas. Develop respect and devotion to God, by trying to eliminate the thoughts that you think will impede and interfere with your tefila. Take your time and think about what is bothering you before you pray. If it is possible, don't let these thought interfere and tell yourself that you will make time later to think about those things, because now is my time to stand before The Almighty! Prayer is not silly mental exercise or an invitation to be frivolous or superficial. This is your time for mental and emotional purification, a time to open your heart and your mind to tefila by thinking of God in positive and uplifting ways. Think of tefila as an opportunity to talk to the One Who understands all of your needs. Think of God as The One Who provides all of your needs and sustains you. This is the One, Who gives you access in obtaining clarity of thought and great Torah knowledge so that you can survive, and partake with enjoyment the beauty and the good of this world! Appeal to God for what you honestly need. Everyone needs the wisdom, insight and discernment that we acquire through

Torah knowledge but we should make this a priority and ask for it with sincerity. God gives this all to us as gifts! As it says in the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei: "You graciously endow man with wisdom and teach insight to a frail mortal. Endow us graciously from Yourself with wisdom, insight and discernment. Blessed are You, H-shem, gracious giver of wisdom." God gives us this as a gift. We can recite each tefila as fresh and new and so that we are more inspired to fulfill this command that is completely for our benefit. When we need to withdraw from our busy, often overstimulating lives, we direct our inner selves to God through prayer. It is our tefila that gives us strength, keeps us calm and brings us true inner peace. Our tefila is the powerful tool that builds and strengthens our trust and our love of God- nothing else is as powerful. □

Superstition II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: You always say that the Torah does not hold of luck or superstition. If so, then one thing confuses me. Those whose parents are still alive leave shul during Yizkor. What is the reason for this if not superstition? Also--on a side note of superstition, why are people so paranoid about their fingernails after they are cut? Some people burn them, some flush them, and I've heard that if a pregnant woman steps on one, she'll miscarry. Where do these ideas come from? Thanks

Mesora: There are no such thing as powers outside of God. You must understand this clearly. Then all else will not pose questions to you, as you will be secure in the rational proof that as only God is the source of all creation, God alone can change the nature of events and properties of objects. This must be clear in your mind.

Once it is, when you come across strange statements in the Torah, you will strive to give rational explanations not assuming powers outside of God.

Regarding your specific questions, leaving shul is not because we feel by staying we die or become mourners. A mourner does not shave or manicure. Perhaps fingernails cause another person psychological anxiety, as he associates to death.

Fear of death can cause miscarriages, fingernails cannot. □

Questions and Answers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Question: Where, in the Torah, is it recorded that three million Jews were present at Mount Sinai and heard the voice of G-D?

Answer: Numbers (Parshas Bamidbar) records the population of males over 20 years of age to be 600,000. Include males below 20 and all females and you arrive at approximately 2-3 million people. This was recorded shortly after the event of God's revelation at Sinai, so this population was present at Sinai. Sources for the Jews hearing God's voice: (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".

Question: Who said "If you dream it, it will come true"?

Answer: Someone stated it was Herzl who made this statement, talking figuratively, or optimistically. Taken scientifically however, this statement misleads others into believing that dreams are causative. In fact, it is impossible that workings of the mind have any effect on physical objects or events.

Question: What is the interpretation of man was "created in God's image"?

Mesora: "God's image" refers to the spiritual element we refer to as intelligence. "Created in God's image" means man alone was created with intelligence.