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The Bible's First Stories

ADAM NOAH THE FLOOD BABEL

3 Top Rabbis
Explain the Bible's
Opening Lessons

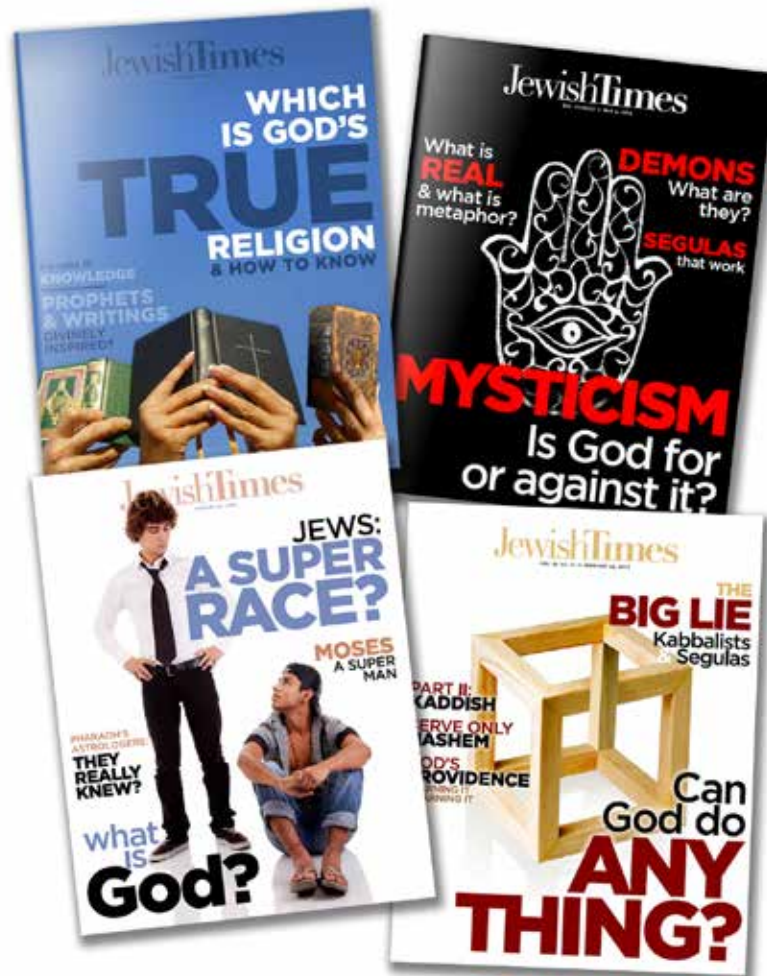


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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Gentiles and the World to Come

Reader: Reader: I'm sure you've read The Way of G-d by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto. On page 417 footnote 61 dealing with Chapter 4, Israel and the Nations, it says "...it is thus taught that non Jews have a portion in the world to come...nevertheless they do not have a full reward for obeying their commandments. They therefore have a separate lesser world to come."

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rabbi: Talmud Avoda Zara 2b-3a explains the meaning of “God releasing the gentiles from their 7 Noahide laws.” Of course, God did no such thing, but the prophet Havakuk does state this. But as in all cases, Torah, Prophets and Writings must be deciphered. Briefly, Havakuk is teaching that as the gentiles of that era no longer possessed a direct transmission of God’s will from Noah, any observance of the Noahide laws would be an act of their own thinking, and not of “following God’s words.” As such, the perfection of following God is absent, and their reward is severely lacking. Read more here: www.Mesora.org/TheNations.html

However, if gentiles do recognize the Noahide laws are directly from God, they do in fact receive greater reward. And if a gentile decides to accept all of Torah as God’s words, he is equal to the Jew in every respect.

Reader: Another quote: “Non-Jews will furthermore not partake in the resurrection, and will therefore exist in the Future World only as souls.” Is this talking about Noachides or Gentiles in general?

Rabbi: A perfected gentile receives the Afterlife. Resurrection of the Dead during the Messianic era is something we will have to wait and see. Perhaps only certain people will be resurrected for some purpose. But one Rabbi stated these resurrected souls will again return to the dust.

Reader: It also says in chapter 4, in the future world Israel will be the only nation. Is this after the Messianic Era?

Rabbi: This means after the Messiah arrives, may he arrive soon, Torah alone will be recognized as God’s religion for all mankind.

Reader: How will Righteous Gentiles get to Israel to live with the Jews, and when?

Rabbi: Gentiles need not move to Israel, for even after all Jews return to Israel, Jews can travel to educate gentiles in all regions, or use technology to communicate the Torah.

Reader: Thanks so so much, this really helped a lot. Going to read Mesora.org/TheNations.html on your site. Hope all is well with you. ■

Proving Sinai

Reader: After a discussion with my girlfriend a very skeptical Jewish mostly secular woman, regarding the proof of revelation at Sinai, I came across your article regarding this matter through an internet search. I am a Jew, an agnostic on some matters with a strong respect for the possible truths. In your article, you noted a question where I found the argument lacking or at least incomplete from my perspective. I have copied it below, and will continue my query following the quote:

“Someone may ask how we know that these events were as described in the Torah, clearly visible, and that they transpired before the entire nation. Perhaps this itself is a fabrication?”

My problem with your answer to this question is that it doesn’t account for the interface between a supposed event and how it actually gets written down and told to the initial experiencing generation and the following generations. Assuming that there were millions of people who may have witnessed the event, or not - could it be that an individual wrote this down, and this accounting (true or not) remarkably was able to retain its integrity due to a faithful people. Also, how do we know the particulars - the historical record - that such a large group witnessed this event. Again,

it is the interface between this “event” and the initial recording where I have trouble following the certainty of your proof. I did very much appreciate and agree with the analysis that preceded this section, laying out the conditions for proof, or proof enough for belief. Thank you for the sharing of your wisdom.

Rabbi: Do we also suggest a disjoint in all other historical claims? Perhaps Caesar, Alexander, and other histories did not occur with “these” people, and not in “those” cities, and not on “those” years. But just as we don’t assume masses erred on such basic story elements and the account retained integrity; they all knew who Caesar was, where he reigned, and in what years...we apply the same reasoning to Sinai. The Jews knew their lineage, their numbers, where they all stood – at a mountain called Sinai – that they all saw fire, and heard intelligence emanating from the fire. ■

—NOACH—

FIRST, SAVE YOURSELF

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Should we be concerned about the survival of the world? Ever since the advent of nuclear weapons, it has been universally assumed that man has the capacity to destroy the planet he lives on.

This conviction was much more palpable during the era of the “Cold War,” when the US and the Soviet Union possessed massive nuclear arsenals.

Both sides maintained a certain degree of rationality and were averse to the idea of annihilating civilization. The governing policy was known as MAD (mutually assured destruction). Each side knew that if it attacked first, the other side would respond in kind, with devastating results. It was a zero-sum game, but the instinct for self-preservation which was shared by both parties enabled the world to emerge unscathed from that dark and fearful era.

With the downfall of the Soviet Union, the danger of nuclear explosion has receded, but it is still a factor to be reckoned with. Oppressive regimes such as Iran and North Korea continue their relentless search for “the bomb.” Even worse is the possibility of terrorist groups that glorify suicide obtaining and unleashing unconventional instruments of unimaginable harm.

Despite all this, weapons of mass destruction do not constitute the greatest threat to mankind’s future. This week’s parsha, Noach, describes a cataclysmic event when God obliterated the earth and its inhabitants. He annihilated His own creation.

This is a legitimate reason to worry about the continued existence of our world. The foremost source of concern is not man’s ability to create devastating weapons.

The true danger emanates from the fact that the world and its inhabitants have a Creator. More specifically, it is because He retains an ongoing relationship with His Creation. Hashem has a “propensity” to judge us and mete out punishment. He may even decide that the world no longer conforms to its purpose and ceases to be “human.” When mankind strays completely from the moral ideal set by the Creator, it is no longer worthy of existence and



may be eliminated.

The generation of the Flood had descended to the level of savages and were guided exclusively by their basest instincts. Hashem decided that the Creation of man was a failure and needed to be terminated. Human existence would have been completely annihilated, were it not for a single individual. Noach was a righteous man who “found favor” with Hashem. God spared him, with his wife and children, to repopulate the Earth after the cataclysmic Deluge.

We must see Noach as one of the most heroic figures in history. After all, we would not be here today if it wasn’t for him. He rejected the extreme hedonism and violence of his time and stood apart from the evil ways of his contemporaries.

To appreciate this, we must realize that the great moral challenge of life is to withstand societal pressure. The need for acceptance and approval is overwhelming. Noach’s greatness was his ability to remain intellectually and morally independent in a corrupt world. This found favor with Hashem.

How did Noach manage to resist the pressure and evil influence of his peers? What gave him the ability to be so fiercely independent?

In this context, it is interesting that Noach, surprisingly, came under criticism from the

Rabbis. They interpret the verse, “For these are as the waters of Noach unto Me,” to be saying that the waters were because of Noach, that he was the cause of the Flood!

This sounds like an outrageous assertion. Noach was a tzadik (righteous man). How could he be blamed for the calamity? The classical answer is that he was not like Avraham, who reached out to others and saved many from a life of idolatry. Noach remained in isolation, taking care of himself and his family. His failure to save others made him responsible for their deeds.

This leads us to a tantalizing question: Why, indeed, did Noach ignore the plight of his brethren? After all, a true tzadik is not only worried for himself, but is concerned about the welfare of all who were created in God’s image.

Rabbi Israel Chait explained that Noach had his limitations. He was able to resist societal influence, but only by keeping himself apart. He knew that if he mingled with the wrongdoers, he would become corrupt, and then all would be lost. So he had to maintain his distance.

This contains an important lesson for us. The verse says, “Noach was a tzadik, pure in his generations. This means in spite of his generation. A person must be true to himself. He must be honest about his strengths and weaknesses and not put himself in situations of spiritual risk. Avraham’s level of faith and conviction was so great that he could not be influenced by the flawed behavior of others.

Not so Noach, who could retain his righteousness only by separating himself from the sinners. We live today in the midst of a culture of debasement, which affects us in many overt and subtle ways. We must protect our unique Torah lifestyle and not put ourselves or our children at risk.

Plato famously said, “To thine own self be true.” I would add the Jewish adage, “Your own life comes first.” When it comes to matters of the soul, one must be extremely selfish. In order to save others, you must first save yourself. May we merit to do so.

Shabbat shalom. ■



ADAM'S SIN & PUNISHMENT

RABBI
ISRAEL
CHAIT

Written by
a student

In order to appreciate the entire sequence of events concerning man's creation, we must analyze the appropriate verses.

In Genesis 2:7 it states, "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This verse depicts man's origin and reflects that man's existence emerged as a living soul, "nefesh chayah." The phrase "living soul" is significant and must be analyzed. Shortly after man's creation, man was charged with a task. Verse 15 states "And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to serve it and to watch it." In the following verses, God charged man with his first commandment. Man was allowed to eat from all the trees of the garden except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. From this Tree of Knowledge man was expressly prohibited from eating. God thereby warned man that on the day he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he would surely perish. It was at this juncture, after God gave man this stern warning about the Tree of Knowledge, that He made the following observation (verse 18), "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone, I will make a helpmate for him.'"

It is puzzling that this verse concerning man's discontent in being alone is placed after the warning about the Tree of Knowledge. It would at first seem that this statement would have more logically been made immediately following man's creation since it reflects the nature of man's existence. Furthermore, the verses following this observation seem incongruous. These subsequent verses discuss the creation of the animals and man's mastery over the animal kingdom. Verses 19 & 20 state, "And out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the

air, and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof. And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him." In addition to the seemingly questionable nexus between the verses, we can pose a few very basic questions. Following the commandment concerning the Tree of Knowledge, God made the statement that it wasn't good for man to be alone. He then proceeded to create the animal kingdom. Why then didn't God create woman at the very inception of the creation of man? If it was apparent to God that man was not happy alone, then why didn't he create woman immediately? What was the compelling reason that God refrained from creating woman until after man was placed in charge of the Garden of Eden and prohibited from partaking of the Tree of Knowledge? It is obvious from the sequence of the verses that God chose not to create woman until after He had created the animal kingdom and placed man in its charge. Furthermore, the entire account of God's creation of the animal kingdom and man's mastery of the animals is concluded with a repetition of man's dissatisfaction with his solitude.

When God ultimately created woman from man, it is interesting to note that man did not name her at the time of her creation as he did with the animals. Rather, it was only after the incident of the snake (which enticed them to eat from the Tree of Knowledge) that man gave woman a name. Genesis 3:20 states, "And the man called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living."

In order to fully appreciate the order of events regarding creation, we must first make the follow-

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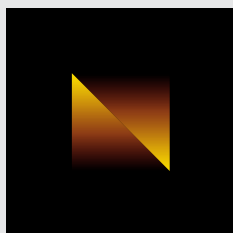
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ing observations in reference to man's nature. These insights will help give us a better understanding of the account of creation, and they will also afford us an appreciation of the complexity of the nature of man. With these observations, we can gain a new perspective on man's constant lifelong struggle to achieve perfection as a moral being.

Maimonides posed a famous question regarding the denial of man of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Verses 16 and 17 state, "And the Lord God commanded the man saying; of every tree in the garden thou may freely eat, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil thou shall not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shall surely die." As Maimonides observed, based on these verses alone, it would seem that God was withholding from man the ability to discern good from evil. This is rather puzzling, since the pursuit of knowledge is the primary objective of the Talmud Chacham. Was it really God's intention to deny knowledge to man? This also contrasts the traditional Judaic belief that God's greatest gift to man was his intellectual faculty. An analysis of relevant verses can help us examine man's true nature and determine that quite the contrary is true.

The aforementioned verse 7 states that God created man as a living soul, "nefesh chaya." The term "chaya" is precise: it reflects the instinctual component of man, the "yetzer hara." This term, "chaya" is also used to reflect the instinctual, as animals are also referred to as chaya. In his Mishna Torah, in the Laws of Forbidden Foods (2:3), Maimonides used this term chaya to reflect the instinctual, which is the essential component of an animal's nature. Thus, it is evident that the composition of man's nature includes the instinctual. As previously questioned, it is now significant that man was charged with his first commandment shortly after his creation. This evidences the other component of human nature.

Man was to watch and guard the Garden of Eden and to enjoy the fruit of the trees as his source of nourishment. However, he was prohibited by the word of God from partaking of the Tree of Knowledge. This task and divine commandment evidences the other aspect of man's nature. Man was given the gift of intelligence, and thus was capable of observing God's commandment. Therefore, it is apparent that God created man with a dual nature. Man not only possesses the instinctual drive (akin to the animal kingdom), but he also possesses the intellectual faculty which enables him to discern what is good and to observe the dictates of God. This dual aspect of man's nature is the primary message of these verses. However, these perfunctory inferences regarding man's nature are also important tools which enable us to more clearly comprehend the entire sequence of creation. Man possesses a hybrid essence of the intellectual and the instinctual. God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge was an appeal to man's intellect. However, at this point in time man lacked a sense of morality, of what is "tov," good, and what is "ra," evil. God forbade man to eat the fruit in order to ensure that man would function in accordance with his intellectual abilities. However, once man disobeyed this command, he was destined to constantly struggle with the passions of the instinctual, which would always be in conflict with his intellectual nature, his yetzer hara.

By disobeying this command and partaking of the forbidden fruit, man abandoned his intellect for the appeal of the fantasy. From this point on, man was destined to face the eternal struggle of "tov v'ra", good and evil.

In verse 18 after God appealed to man's intellect by admonishing him not to eat of the forbidden fruit, God then made the observation that it was not good for man to be alone – man needed a helpmate. God was cognizant that man was unable to channel all of his energies to the intellectual. In such a state, man's energies would soon have

been frustrated. By His statement in verse 18, God acknowledged that it is not good for man to be alone, for such a state would lead to the frustration of man's instinctual energies. This observation is attested to by the subsequent series of verses. Man utilized his innate intellectual abilities to name, classify, dominate and rule the animal kingdom. It was during the performance of this task that man observed that each animal was capable of satisfying its instinctual desires. Man therefore attempted to satisfy his own instinctual needs, but was unable to find a helpmate. Man realized that his dual nature could not be satisfied with an entity whose entire essence was instinctual. Through his cognitive efforts, he became aware of his inability to channel all of his instinctual energies into intellectual gratification. Therefore, the sequence of events leading to the creation of woman is more understandable. Although man was created with both instinctive and intellectual drives, it was only through his own efforts that he came to realize his inability to channel his total instinctual energies into the world of the intellectual. It was only after he made this observation, did God then create woman. Verses 21 and 22 state, "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man, made He a woman and brought her unto the man." It is not coincidental that God created woman from man's rib. Man was incapable of satisfying his instinctual desires with a being that operated solely in the world of the instinctual. Such a relationship would only be physical, and by definition could not be enduring or fulfilling. When God created woman, man was not solely attracted by his instinctual desires, but there was a psychological attraction as well. In verse 23 man comments as follows in reference to his wife, "'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.'" Man's attraction to woman stemmed from his love of his own self. Man's narcissistic desires fostered the relationship that developed between man and woman. Man is a complex being, and even his instinctual drives are inexorably intermixed with his psychological awareness. This explains the medrash (allegory) that man originally had two forms from which the woman originated. This basis of man's attraction for woman also serves to shed light on the reason why woman was not created at the time of man's creation. Man's instinctual energies were not capable of fulfillment in a purely instinctual relationship – a psychological attraction was also required.

It is therefore apparent that the entire creation of man was designed by God in a manner which allowed man's nature to play a role in the emerging sequence of events of creation. Man was created with a yetzer hatov, the intellectual faculty whose objective for man is to live a life guided by wisdom and morality. However, man was also bestowed with a yetzer hara, instinctual needs and desires. As a result, man's libido could not be satisfied by directing all of his energies to the intellectual. Because of his hybrid nature, man discovered that he was incapable of satisfying his physical needs and desires in a purely instinctual relationship. His excess energies which were not absorbed by the intellectual were frustrated and could not reach gratification. This gratification required a relationship whereby there was also a psychological attraction. Thus God created woman, a blessing from God which allowed man and woman to function in a harmonious manner.

It is only after we observe the emergence of human nature through the events of creation that we can properly analyze the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Prior to the sin, man's energies were primarily directed to intellectual endeavors. Man took charge of his surroundings and used his intellectual abilities to master the environ-

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ment. However, the excess instinctive energy which could not be satisfied by intellectual endeavors was channeled into a healthy relationship with Eve. Man's energies were directed towards phenomena that were physically present. By commanding man not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, God was disciplining man's instinctual drives and demonstrating that the instinctual must always be subordinated and controlled by the intellectual. Our mesora (oral tradition) tells us that the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge were not unique. Its appeal was solely based on the prohibition to indulge in them. It appealed to man's yetzer hara, his desires. Verse 6 states, "And the woman saw that the food was good to eat and that it was a delight for the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise. She took of the fruit and ate it, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat it." Maimonides noted that this verse evidences the breadth of man's desires. The tree was an ordinary tree, yet the appeal of the fantasy was overwhelming. The tree was appealing to the eye, though common, and was good to eat, though never tasted. Thus, by partaking of the tree, man succumbed to the allurements of the fantasy. Before the sin, man's energies were directed to the physical phenomena that were in his presence. Our Rabbis teach us that prior to the sin, man's evil inclination was controllable, but after the sin, there was a qualitative change. Man's instinctual desires were internal and external. Before the sin, man's libido naturally was attracted to wisdom, and his energies were automatically drawn to thought. Subsequent to the sin, man's energies naturally flowed to the physical. By indulging the fantasy, man incorporated into his personality the vehicle by which the energies of man are drawn to the physical. The enticements of the tree and the entrapment of man's imagination allowed man's energies to become fixated on the physical. This sin shaped the human personality for the millennium. Man was doomed, for at the moment his energies became fixated on the physical, it became a constant source of man's attention. His energies became attached to the physical and naturally flowed to it. Man's sin molded his soul. Mankind was destined to be ensnared by fantasy, and his energies would from then on be guided by the imagination. It would seek its initial gratification from the world of the physical. Thus, down through the generations to our present time, whenever man sins and is overwhelmed by the desires of the instinctual, he too molds his soul. He becomes drawn to and affected by the trappings of physical pleasures, his imagination overwhelms him, and as a result, distances himself from God. After the sin, man's only hope for salvation is to re-channel his energies. A wise man is one whose thought process is not influenced or corrupted by the instinctual. However, the ordinary individual who cannot properly channel his energies away from the instinctual, his emotions cloud his intellect and the physical corrupts his thinking process.

In any event, man has the free will to withdraw the energies which are now naturally attracted to the physical by the power of fantasy, and can re-direct them towards the intellectual. By choosing such a path, man also molds his soul, directs his energies and becomes attached to and leads the life of a chacham (wise man) and becomes close to God. A task such as this is monumental, and requires great conviction. Battling instinctual drives requires great fortitude, intellect, and inner strength. The appellation of a "gibor", a strong person, is reserved for one who conquers the evil inclination. However, God, in punishing man for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, has armed man with the ability, if he exercises his free will wisely, to be victorious in this battle.

God's punishment is different from that of man. A punishment from God is given to help benefit man. An analysis of the verses subsequent to the sin can help us to understand the punishment and its ramifica-



tions with respect to the human personality. In chapter 3, verse 7 states, "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths." Prior to the sin, the Torah explicitly tells us that they were not ashamed of their nakedness. The Torah is teaching us by contrasting these facts, that prior to the sin, man did not experience embarrassment. Shame is a function of man's conscience. Before man sinned, man's energies were naturally directed to chachma, to intellectual pursuits. After the sin, man fell prey to the instinctual. The intellectual was overpowered by the instinctual. However, man now had an additional ally to help combat the forces of the physical...his conscience. The conscience of man helps him to determine good from evil. The yetzer hatov, man's good inclination, helps man to withdraw his energies from the world of the physical and re-direct them to the world of chachma, wisdom. However, before man sinned, he did not possess the ability to discern good from evil. His mind was naturally drawn to the intellectual. After the sin man's energies flow first to the physical, which is capable of paralyzing him. God thereby instilled in man a conscience to help him progress into the world of the ideational and not stagnate in the world of the physical. It is only with the aid of the yetzer hatov, the ability to discern good, that man can use his free will and channel his energies to the acquisition of wisdom. It is therefore no coincidence that immediately after God pronounced His punishment for the sin (and man was endowed with both good and evil inclinations), man began to utilize his conscience to channel his energies properly. First, he experienced shame and covered his nakedness. Then, as chapter 3 verse 20 relates, "And the man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living." It seems incongruous that this occurs immediately after the pronouncement of man's punishment. However, the reason is now readily apparent. This manifests that man was using the yetzer hatov to help direct his energies towards wisdom. He exercised his intelligence to classify and name his wife. It was a definitional exercise that required his intellectual abilities. From this we can ascertain that a punishment from God is unique, as it is executed for the benefit of man. This particular event bestowed man with good and evil inclinations. It is only with the aid of the yetzer hatov that man can overcome the pitfalls of sin and can withdraw his energies away from the physical and utilize his intellect to live a life based on wisdom. ■



Noah: The Generation of the Flood

*Messages in
the Passages*

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT
Written by a student

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 God 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 God’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 God of man’s fate was actually preceded by two earlier observations and warnings. Genesis 6:2 states, “That the sons of God 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. God thereby gave man his first warning. Man was given 120 years to repent from his sexual corruption or God would destroy mankind.

God makes his second observation, “And God 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 (Gen. 6:5).” This observation of the quantitative increase in man’s nefarious conduct led God to the conclusion that He will obliterate mankind from upon the face of the Earth.

An analysis of these observations and warnings from God 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 abstention. In his Mishna Torah under laws of Kedusha, Maimonides has two categories: the laws of forbidden sexual relationships and the laws of forbidden foods. Thus, sanctity stems from man’s 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, God 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 God’s authority, 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 command-

ment does not necessitate a prophet's warning 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. However, man 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, God 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.

Noah 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. 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 in respect to 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 functions therein. In terms of his personal ideals (of mono-

theism) 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-doro-sav", "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

Rabbi Israel Chait

Written by a student



It is a well-established principle in Judaism that a punishment from God is unique. When God punishes man, it is for his betterment. However, the generation of the flood was destroyed because there was no justification for their existence. In contrast, the generation that built the tower of Babel was not destroyed. We must then 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 God prefers for their not being destroyed was because their sin was only against God. 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 Nazis. 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 expression. 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 an 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.

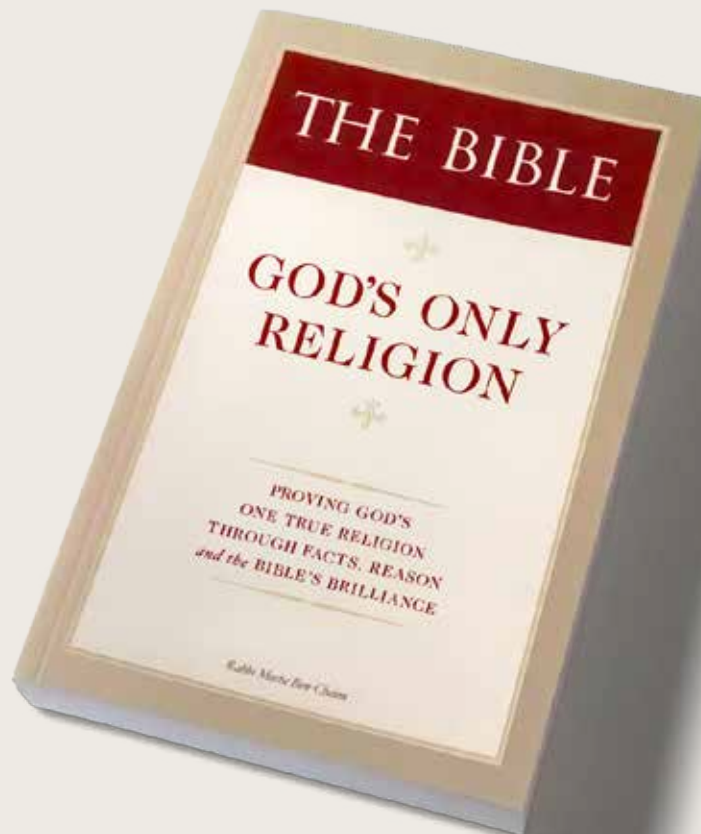
The emotions of man are also very cunning and can operate in a disguised fashion. They can function in such a way as to be hidden – even to the person himself. Madison Avenue, the renowned center of advertising, carefully manipulates the emotions in this manner. A person who fantasizes that he’s a great cowboy will smoke

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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, God 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 God'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 – and not



adults. Thus, God 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 God 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 God" that were saved from the flood.

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

Man's innate nature is aggressive. This is attested to by the many atrocities committed by man throughout the annals of history. Man generally directed his aggres-

sion 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 God. Their emotions of hatred and their aggressive tendencies found a substitute formation, namely God. Their inherent aggressive tendencies, which are usually directed one against another, now found an alternate means of expression – a rebellion against God. However, these people whose ancestors were recently obliterated by God because of their corruption, could not in good sense express open hostility and hatred to God.

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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 primarily 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 God 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 God. 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 God. Conversely, halacha (Jewish law) demands that the tallest building in a community must be the synagogue. God must maintain the greatest prominence in our minds.

God 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. God realized that this emotion was dangerous and must be dealt with accordingly. Thus in 11:7, God responds, "Come, let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." God was confounding their language as the vehicle to break their identification with each other. Once they had different languages, different cultures would flourish. When God changed their culture and language, hatred and jealousy commenced. When each society has its own unique culture and language, the identification between the different societ-

ies is mitigated greatly. This enables man's aggressive instinct to express itself, by acts of hatred and aggression against another society. Therefore God'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 God'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 God. 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 God. It is only then that mankind can experience true peace.

We can therefore appreciate the necessity of God'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. God's punishment was obviously more lenient with the generation of the Tower of Babel. The bothersome problem is that hatred and rebellion against God 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 God cannot fathom an arrogant

person, as the power of the ego is great – denying God – yet, such a person can still be reached. The conceited individual still operates on a rational level; he is just inflicted 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, God's punishment was to confound their language and break their identification. This resulted in man's aggressive instinct to be directed away from God. 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 God 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. ■

Small Words Big Meanings

BERAISHIS/NOACH

Rabbi Bernie Fox



"These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man. He was wholehearted among those of his generation. Noah went with Hashem. And Noah fathered three sons – Shem, Cham, and Yafet (Sefer Beresheit 6:9-10)."

1. Hashem decides to bring the Deluge but to save Noah and his family

The above passages continue the narrative describing the Deluge that began at the end of Parshat Beresheit. In Parshat Beresheit, the Torah described the moral degeneration of humanity. This decay is described as an abandonment of sexual restraint. In our parasha, this aspect of the descent of

humanity is again referenced and also the escalation and then profusion of violence.

Hashem decrees that He will destroy with the Deluge, humanity and much of the organic life of the world He had created. However, this will not be the end of humankind. A remnant of humanity and of animal and avian life will be saved. From this small remnant life will be reestablished and the Earth will be repopulated.

Hashem selects Noah and his family to be saved. He commands Noah to construct an ark and to bring into it his family. The ark will also be a refuge for representatives of each species of animal and avian life and it will contain adequate food to sustain its inhabitants for the duration of the Deluge.

In the passages above, the Torah describes

Noah as the outstanding tzadik – righteous individual – of his generation. It also reviews the names of his three sons – Shem Cham and Yafet.

2. Two translation of the first passage of Parshat Noach

The actual translation of the second word of the first passage is not clear. The translation above seems to be the one suggested by Unkelus and accepted by Rashbam, Nachmanides and others. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra notes this translation and rejects it. He suggests that the proper translation is "These are the events of the life of Noah."

This dispute can be understood from a purely textual perspective. Unkelus' translation presents a problem. He translates the opening of the passage "These are the descendants of Noah." If this translation is correct, one would expect the passage to continue with a list of these descendants. It does not continue with this list. Instead, it describes Noah's righteousness. Rashi addresses this issue. He suggests that once the Torah mentions Noah, it interrupts its presentation of his descendants in order to acknowledge his righteousness. Once it has acknowledged Noah, it resumes the narrative and lists his sons.

Ibn Ezra's translation avoids this difficulty. The Torah is providing a biographical account of Noah's life. It is recounting crucial events in his lifetime. It is appropriate in the context of this sketch to describe Noah's remarkable ethical and spiritual achievements.

In short, it is possible to explain each position based on textual considerations. However, let us consider another question. Does the choice of translation impact our overall understanding of the narrative? In other words, is this dispute's significance limited to the translation of a single word or do the alternative translations impact our understanding of the unfolding narrative?

3. Parshat Noach: Noah's story or the story of his descendants?

The first step in answering this question is to identify the objective of the passage. This passage introduces the parasha. In other words, it is the introduction to the events that will be subsequently described – the Deluge and its aftermath. The next step is to consider the message of this introduction

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according to each translation. According to Ibn Ezra, the introduction tells us that we are about to hear of the events of the life of Noah. Noah is identified as the key actor and the events that will unfold are intimately related to him.

The commentators who translate the passage as a listing of the children of Noah, have a different understanding of this introduction. The ensuing account is the story of Noah's descendants.

In summary, these two translations suggest two interpretations of the narrative of the Deluge. It is the story of Noah, according to Ibn Ezra. According to the other group of scholars, it is the account of Noah's descendants. But let us consider whether these two interpretations have a deeper significance.

"In the beginning the L-rd created the heavens and the land. And the land was empty and desolate. Darkness covered the face of the depths. And the spirit of the L-rd fluttered over the surface of the water (Sefer Beresheit 1:2)."

4. Two translations of the first passages of the Torah

No passages of the Torah are better known than its first. The above translation is the most commonly provided. It is accepted by Unkelus and many others. Ibn Ezra elaborates on the meaning of the passages according to this translation. He explains that the passages assert that there is a beginning of all material existence. There is a first moment at which the infant material universe began to emerge. In other words, the universe is not eternal. It has a beginning and it has a Creator.

Rashi, Ibn Ezra and others reject this translation. They translate the passages as follows:

"In the beginning of the L-rd's creation of the heavens and the land, the land was empty and desolate. Darkness covered the face of the depths. And the spirit of the L-rd fluttered over the surface of the water (Sefer Beresheit 1:2)."

They suggest that the passages are not focused on asserting that the universe was created by Hashem. Instead, they describe the primeval state of the material universe. It was empty and desolate.

The dispute between these scholars focuses upon grammatical consideration and Hebrew etymology. However, again, let us ask wheth-

er these different translations suggest alternative interpretations of the message of the creation narrative.

5. Two translations and two messages

In this instance, the difference between the messages suggested by the respective translations is more easily identified. Ibn Ezra tells us the message of the narrative according to the first translation. The Torah is outlining one of Judaism's fundamental tenets. The material universe is not eternal. It was created at the beginning of time. There is a Creator.

However, the translation accepted by Rashi and Ibn Ezra, communicates another message. The primeval universe was empty and desolate. But the spirit of Hashem hovered over that emptiness. That influence introduced organization into chaos and life into desolation. The message of the creation narrative is that Hashem brings order and meaning into chaos and void.

6. The theme of Sefer Beresheit

These alternative interpretations of the creation narrative have implications for the entire Sefer Beresheit. The sefer begins with the creation narrative but eventually describes the lives of our patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Let us assume that the sefer is an organic whole and its parts are synthesized. Then, the creation narrative introduces the account of the lives of our patriarchs and their lives are a continuation of the creation narrative.

The first interpretation of the creation narrative suggests that it outlines Judaism's tenet that the universe was created and has a Creator. The narrative of our patriarchs explains how that tenet was communicated to the Jewish people and humanity. Avraham rediscovered this truth – that the universe was created and has a Creator. He taught this tenet to his followers and established it as a legacy for his descendants.

However, if the creation narrative focuses on Hashem's fashioning of order from chaos and life from the void, then the theme of the sefer is very different. It describes the ongoing influence of this Divine will. Hashem's will is expressed in the emergence of organic life. It is also expressed in humanity's advancement from the chaos of primitive superstition to systematic, thoughtful contemplation and the resultant discovery of a Creator. Both of these are expressions of His will that order replace chaos.

7. Two interpretations of the narrative of the Deluge

Now let us return to the opening passages of Parshat Noah. We identified two alternative messages expressed by the passages. According to one set of scholars, these passages describe the ensuing narrative as the story of the descendants of Noah. According to the other set, the narrative is the biography of Noah.

If the narrative of Parshat Noah is the story of Noah descendants, then it is continuing the account of our origin. It is explaining the origins of the family of nations and accounting for our similarities and our diversity. It reinforces the creation narrative and its message – our universe has a Creator.

However, Ibn Ezra and others assert that Parshat Noah is the biography of Noah. It is the story of a single man's battle to be true to Hashem and to his own values while living in a society that completely rejects these values. It is the story of how Hashem saved this person and through him the rest of humanity. In other words, it describes how Hashem prevented His world from retreating back into moral and spiritual chaos and how He sustained humanity's quest for truth and understanding.

8. Our mission

The scholars discussed above differ on the message of Sefer Beresheit. However, one of the reasons that they can dispute such an issue is that both messages are true. Because both are true, each is a plausible theme for Sefer Beresheit. We are the recipients of Avraham's legacy – the recognition of Hashem as Creator. Also, humanity is charged with the responsibility of continuing the process described in the opening chapters of the sefer. We must continue the process of creation – to replace chaos and desolation with order, life, and meaning.

Perhaps, the overarching message of Sefer Beresheit is that the universe is not meaningless and arbitrary. Neither is our place within it. We choose whether we will live our lives in a manner that is consistent with this meaning and whether our lives will be expressions of this meaning. When we choose to recognize Hashem and continue – in our individual ways – His act of creation, then we embody the message of the creation narrative and we will bring meaning into our lives. ■

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