

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON NOACH - 5765

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"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Noach

Sins Committed In Private Ultimately Lead To a Violent Society

At the beginning of our parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And the earth became corrupt before G-d; and the earth became filled with robbery" [Bereshis 6:11]. If we read this pasuk carefully, we can detect a cause and effect scenario of spiritual decline in the generation that preceded the flood.

The implication of the first part of the pasuk is that the areas where society initially went astray were those areas that were visible only "before G-d". The Talmud [Sandhedrin 57a] specifically links the word used for corruption (hashchasa) in this pasuk to idolatry and sexual immorality (incest and adultery).

The corruption spoken of initially was not all encompassing. It was limited to specific crimes, that for the most part were committed in the privacy of the church or the privacy of one's bedroom. These were crimes that were known only to G-d. But the pasuk continues and says that as a result of these "private/personal" sins, the whole earth became filled with robbery and violence (chamas).

The lesson to be derived here is that immorality that occurs between "consenting adults" in the privacy of their own home DOES affect society. It is not true that I need not be concerned about what happens "behind closed doors". Society will fall apart when violence and corruptions break out into the open. But all of that happens as a direct result of an earlier break down of moral code that occurred only "before G-d."

I am not sure if this lesson would resonate as being self-apparent 100 years ago. However in today's world, one does not need to be a genius to observe in our societal surroundings, the truth that emerges from the above-quoted pasuk.

During the entire year 1940, there were 39 murders in the city of New York. Today those figures have skyrocketed. If a person who lived in New York City in the nineteen forties entered a time warp, and was transported 60 years to New York City today, he would be in for quite a shock. People are afraid to ride the subways. The doors to regular homes are protected with double and triple locks as if every residence was Fort Knox. Our time-warp tourist would see signs in cars "No Radio." He would not be able to figure it out. "Why would someone advertise that he is too poor to afford a radio in his car?"

If, as a society, we would have to suddenly change from life as it was fifty or sixty years ago to what is today, there is no way we would be able to handle it. If we would have told someone in 1940 that he would need a club on his car, his children could not walk to school, he would need all kind of security devices around his home, and he would not be able to ride the subway at night, all of the 'minimal' precautions that are

absolutely necessary today - the person would have said, "I can not imagine living in such a society".

But millions of people are still living such a life under exactly these threats and inconveniences. Why? Because the deterioration has been gradual. What has happened since 1940? One of the things that happened is something called "the sexual revolution." People advanced the argument that whatever takes place between consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes is none of anyone else's business. "Doing my own thing does not affect society."

Western Society today is a living proof of the lesson spelled out in the pasuk beginning "And the land became corrupt before G-d." Sins that people perform that may be only visible to G-d Himself, will ultimately affect society such that the earth becomes filled with violence. When people are afraid to walk the street, it is the manifestation of "the earth becomes filled with violence." When it is necessary to have 10 cars per night patrolling residential neighborhoods because people are afraid of gangs and robberies, it is the manifestation of "the earth becomes filled with violence". This all began because of sins committed "only before G-d."

A Comparison Of Two Men and Two Careers

Toward the end of the parsha [reading], the pasuk says, "And Noach, the man of the earth debased himself and planted a vineyard" [Bereshis 9:20]. The Medrash on this pasuk comments that Noach was initially referred to as a righteous man (ish tzadik), but later in life he was referred to as a man of the earth (ish haAdama). The Medrash contrasts Noach's spiritual decline with the spiritual growth of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was initially called an Egyptian (ish Mitzri) but later in life he was referred to as a man of G-d (ish haElokim).

Moshe's life was a story of spiritual growth. Early in life, people assumed that he was just another Egyptian Prince. But he developed himself and grew into the man of G-d. Noach is introduced to us as a very pious man, the most righteous in his generation. The last we hear of him, however, is that he was a simple farmer who debased himself by getting drunk.

Why did Noach's spiritual career end in relative ignominy? There is another Medrash that addresses this question. The Medrash states that there were three people who became obsessed with land to their spiritual detriment: Kayin, Noach, and Uziyahu. The Medrash says that farming became the primary aspect of Noach's life.

We would not expect Noach to abstain from working the land. He was not living in Gan Eden. He really had no other choice in the matter. He had to make a living. He had to plant. The Medrash is not criticizing Noach for trying to make a living.

But the Medrash is saying that the pasuk is teaching that Noach became so consumed with his career in farming that he was transformed from an "ish tzadik" into an "ish haAdamah". In the final analysis, the land became his raison d'etra.

True, there is nothing wrong with going out to make a living. But, if one lets himself be defined by his profession - Noach "the farmer," rather than Noach the Righteous one - then that is a tragedy.

The Zohar states that Rav Shimon Bar Yochai once met Rav Yossi and he saw that the latter was thinking about worldly matters - non-spiritual things. He chastised Rav Yossi, telling him that he was not the same person who he used to be. Rav Yossi took the chastisement to heart. He refocused his mental energies to Torah and rejoiced in that experience. Rav Shimon Bar Yochai then commented, "the old Rav Yossi I remember has returned."

According to the words of the Zohar, the proof that Rav Yossi returned to his old self was that he "rejoiced in his Torah." The thing that defined him before was his Torah. Torah made him tick. When he - for a time - got distracted with worldly matters, he lost his focus and raison d'etra in life. The proof that he again became 'the old Rav Yossi' was not the fact

that he returned to the Beis Medrash (study hall). It was the fact that he rejoiced in his Torah. This became his life, his reason for living. Then, once again he became the Rav Yossi of old.

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From: office@etzion.org.il Sent: Oct 14, 2004 To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il
Subject: PARSHA Parashat Noach - Rav Yaakov Medan
Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Parashat Hashavua This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l. This shiur is dedicated in memory of Howard (Haim) Greenspan z"l.

It is with great pleasure that we dedicate this shiur to the engagement of Hadas Frankel and Moshe Bick, son of Rav Ezra and Etta Bick. May we remind our readers that this engagement follows closely upon the birth of Hodaya Rivka, daughter to Rachel and Ariel Hessel and the first grandchild in the Bick family. May the extended Bick family continue to share many semachot with us!
It is with great pleasure that we dedicate this shiur as well to the birth of Yonatan Avraham Abba, son of Rav Yair and Hadassa Kahn. May the extended Kahn-Privas family be zocheh to raise Yonatan Avraham Abba and the entire clan le-Torah, le-chuppa, u-le-maasim tovim! Mazal Tov on the birth of a son to Binyamin and Efrat Koslowsky and a brother to Noam.
Parashat Noach

"THEN SHALL I BRING UPON THE NATIONS A
CLEAR LANGUAGE"
BY RAV YAAKOV MEDAN

INTRODUCTION

"G-d said to Avram: 'Go away from your land and your birthplace and your father's house to the land which I will show you. And I shall make you a great nation, and I shall bless you, and I shall make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I shall bless those who bless you, and those who curse you shall I curse. And all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.' So Avram went as G-d had spoken to him, and Lot went with him; and Avram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan." (Bereishit 12:1-4) The Torah's opening verses about Avraham give no reason for G-d's revelation to him. We are introduced to him at mid-life; he is already 75 years old. We are left with several questions: what is the beginning of the story? Why does G-d choose Avraham and send him to walk about in the land? In what way is Avraham different from the twenty preceding generations, all of which angered G-d? And even if we succeed in unearthing the story of Avraham prior to G-d's revelation to him, we must still ask: why does the Torah not explain why G-d chose him?

TEACHINGS OF THE SAGES WITH THEIR MYSTERIES Since the Torah provides no reason as to the selection of Avraham, we must turn to Chazal. The Midrash recounts two stories (Bereishit Rabba 38, 13) concerning Avraham's life during his first seventy-five years: a. "Charan died before Terach, his father" – Rabbi Chiya bar Beriya said in the name of Rav Ada of Yaffo: Terach was an idolater [idol merchant]. Once he went off to a certain place, and he left Avraham as shopkeeper in his stead. A person came who wished to buy [an idol]. [Avraham] said to him: 'How old are you?' The man replied, 'Fifty or sixty.' Avraham said: 'Woe to this man, who is sixty

years old, and he must serve an idol created just yesterday!' [The man] was ashamed, and went away. Another time a woman came, bringing a bowl of meal. She said to him, 'Take this; offer it to the idols.' [Avraham] got up, took a hammer, smashed all the idols and placed the hammer in the hand of the biggest of them. When his father returned, he asked: 'Who did this to them?' [Avraham] answered, 'A woman came and brought them a bowl of meal; she told me to offer it before them. I offered it before them, and one said: "I shall eat first," then another said, "I shall eat first." The biggest among them got up, took a hammer, and smashed them.' [His father] said, 'What nonsense are you telling me – do they then have any understanding?' [Avraham] answered, 'Do your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?!" b. "They took him and handed him over to Nimrod [the king]. He said to him, 'Worship the fire!' Avraham answered, 'Shall I then also worship water, which extinguishes fire?' Nimrod said to him: 'Worship the water!' He answered: 'Then should I also worship the cloud, which bears the water?' He said, 'Worship the cloud!' [Avraham] answered, 'Then should I also worship the wind, which disperses clouds?' [Nimrod] said, 'Worship the wind!' He answered, 'Shall I then worship man, who endures the wind?' He said, 'You talk too much; I worship only fire.

I am going to throw you into it; let the G-d whom you worship come and save you from it!' Charan was standing there. He said, 'Either way [I shall be safe] – if Avraham wins, I shall say, "I am with Avraham." If Nimrod wins, I shall say, "I am with Nimrod.'" When Avraham entered the fiery furnace and was saved, they said to him: 'On whose side are you?' He told them, 'I am with Avraham!' They took [Charan] and cast him into the fire, and he was burned and died before Terach, his father. Therefore it is written, 'Charan died before Terach, his father.'" Before explaining the midrashim, let us first say a few words about our basic attitude towards Chazal's teachings. Chazal are not story-tellers, and obviously anyone who understands Chazal's teachings literally is a simpleton. The purpose behind Chazal's narratives is also not to convey ancient legends, but rather, principally, to interpret the Torah. The source for any narrative by Chazal is usually to be found in some prior biblical incident. How so? In many instances the Torah is cryptic and fails to recount events that serve as background and causes of things that we read about in the text. So it is in our case: there is no explanation for Terach's sudden departure from Ur Kasdim, nor for G-d's selection of Avraham. Chazal, as biblical commentators, come to explain that which is opaque. For this reason, they create legends which "fill the gaps" in the text. In our case, as in many others, our question is: upon what do Chazal base their narrative? Why do they choose to recount specifically this story about Avraham, or some other story about Yaakov? It seems that Chazal followed the well-known principle, "The Torah text elaborates in certain cases and is brief in others." Wherever there are gaps in the biblical narrative, Chazal compare the character or the subject under discussion to a parallel biblical passage. This comparison provides the basis for a "filling-in" of the picture, to create a sort of "photomontage" that completes the missing pieces of the puzzle. If we try to trace Chazal's sources for the stories about Avraham, we arrive at two biblical narratives: the story of Gidon ben Yoash smashing idols is the inspiration for the first midrash quoted above, while the episode of Chanania, Mishael and Azaria in the fiery furnace represents the inspiration for the story of Avraham's own trial of fire. What causes Chazal to connect these stories to the life of Avraham? It is this question that we shall investigate in this shiur.

GIDON AND THE SMASHING OF THE IDOLS

"It happened on that night that G-d said to him: 'Take your father's ox and another ox seven years old, and destroy your father's altar to Ba'al, and cut down the ashera that is upon it. And build an altar to the Lord your G-d at the top of this strong point, where it is level. Take the second ox and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the ashera which you will cut down.' So Gidon took ten men of his servants and did as G-d had commanded him. And because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night. When the men of the city awoke in the morning, behold – the altar to Ba'al was broken and the ashera that was upon it was cut down, and the second ox had been offered as a burnt offering upon the built-up altar. They said to each other, 'Who has done this?' They investigated and sought out, and it was said, 'Gidon, the son of Yoash, did this thing. Then the men of the city said to Yoash, 'Bring out your son that he may die, for he has broken the altar to Ba'al, and because he cut down the ashera that was upon it.' And Yoash said to all those who stood against him, 'Shall you then fight for Ba'al, shall you save him? Let anyone who pleads on his behalf be put to death by morning! If he is a god – let him fight for himself, for his altar is broken.' And on that day they called him Yeruba'al, saying, 'Let Ba'al fight against him for he has broken his altar.'" (Shoftim 6:25-32) This story is remarkably

similar to the legend about Avraham: Gidon breaks his father's altar, used for idolatry – corresponding to Avraham's destruction of the idols belonging to Terach, his father. The question is why Chazal "pair up" Gidon and Avraham, carrying over the story from one to the other. What is the basis for this comparison?

It seems that the parallel between Avraham and Gidon is based upon the story of the war of the four kings, since in many respects that war fought by Avraham is similar to Gidon's war against Midian. 1. The number of fighters: In parashat Lekh-lekha we find an astounding military scenario: how could Avraham take only three hundred and eighteen men to fight against a mighty alliance of four kings, with a vast number of soldiers? A similar question arises concerning Gidon's fighters: they number a mere three hundred, against a massive army of a hundred and fifty thousand (see Shoftim 7:12 and 8:10). 2. Course of the war: Avraham's battle tactic is, "He divided himself and his servants against them, by night" (14:15). This was calculated to confuse the enemy forces and to exploit the element of surprise to create panic in their camp. This tactic is especially effective when implemented against an alliance of different kings, where the allied armies are unfamiliar with one another. The classic example of such a battle is to be found in the story of Gidon, who comes upon the enemy forces with three groups of soldiers in the middle of the night, exploiting to the full the ensuing panic in the camp comprised of soldiers from Amalek, Midian and Bnei Kedem. Based on this parallel, we may assume that Avraham too, like Gidon, used the element of surprise in the middle of the night to startle the enemy. Since their camp also was comprised of forces representing different kings, this created chaos. In the dark, the soldiers mistook identities and fought each other, eventually fleeing in all directions. 3. Purpose of the war: At the conclusion of Gidon's pursuit of the kings of Midian, we discover the reason for it: "He said to Zevach and to Tzalmuna: Where are the men whom you killed at Tavor?" They said, "Like you – so were they, with the appearance of the sons of a king" (Shoftim 8:18). In other words, Gidon was trying to establish what had become of his brethren who were killed at Tavor – apparently on their way to call the men of Ephraim to war. Similarly, Avraham pursued the kings in order to find out what had happened to Lot, his nephew. 4. Avraham and Eliezer vs. Gidon and Pura Rashi quotes the Gemara (Nedarim 32a), asserting that Avraham and Eliezer alone prevailed over the four kings:

"Three hundred and eighteen..." – Our Sages taught: There was only Eliezer. The 'three hundred and eighteen' refers to the numerical value of his name."

This Midrash is most surprising: Is it not impressive enough that Avraham destroyed the camp of four kings with the help of only three hundred and eighteen men? For what reason do they reduce this number to Eliezer alone? "The literal meaning of the text never departs" – we cannot deny the explicit verses teaching that Avraham wages war against the kings with the help of his 318 servants. Therefore, what Chazal are trying to teach seems to be that although 318 men came along, Avraham and Eliezer alone would have sufficed to win. This type of message is certainly reminiscent of the story of Gidon and Pura, his attendant:

"It happened that night that G-d said to him, 'Arise, go down to the camp, for I have given it into your hands. If you are afraid to go down – go with Pura, your attendant, towards the camp [1]. Listen to what they say, and then you will be strengthened to go down into the camp.' So he and Pura, his attendant, went down to the outskirts of the armed men of the camp... and Gidon came, and behold – a man was telling his neighbor about his dream, and he said: 'Behold, I dreamed a dream: a slice of barley bread was rolling about in the camp of Midian, and it came up to the tent and struck it so it fell and was overturned, so the tent collapsed.' His neighbor replied, 'This can mean nothing else but the sword of Gidon, the son of Yoash, a man of Israel. G-d has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.' When Gidon heard the teller of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down, and returned to the camp of Israel, and said: 'Arise, for G-d has given the camp of Midian into your hands.'" (Shoftim 7:9-15)

The story of Gidon and Pura reminds us of the battle of Mikhamas, in which Yehonatan, son of Shaul, and his servant succeed in dispersing an entire camp. Since Chazal compare Gidon's battle and that of Avraham, it would seem necessary in order to complete the parallel that Avraham go down to the camp of the kings like Gidon or Yehonatan. Therefore, Chazal teach that Avraham descended with Eliezer alone.

These similar elements are the basis for Chazal's parallel between Gidon and Avraham, in light of which they raise another point of similarity: just as Gidon started his rebellion by smashing his father's altar, overcoming any fear of standing against the entire nation and placing G-d's altar as an alternative to that of Ba'al, so Avraham shattered his father's idols and introduced the alternative: worship of G-d.

THE FIERY FURNACE As mentioned above, the story of Avraham's trial in the fiery furnace is inspired by the story of Chanania, Mishael and Azaria, recounted in the Book of Daniel, chapter 3:

"King Nevukhadnetzar made an idol of gold, sixty amot high and six amot wide, and erected it in the valley of Dura in the province of Bavel. Then Nevukhadnetzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to an inauguration of the idol which King Nevukhadnetzar had set up, and they stood before the image that Nevukhadnetzar had set up. Then the herald cried out: 'To you it is commanded, o nations, peoples and tongues – at the time when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and all kinds of music – all the nations, peoples and tongues shall fall and bow down to the idol of gold which Nevukhadnetzar has set up. And whoever will not fall and bow down shall immediately be thrown into the midst of the burning furnace.' At the time when all the nations heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the nations, peoples and tongues fell and bowed down to the idol of gold which Nevukhadnetzar had set up. At that time some people of Kasdim came near and accused the Jews... Nevukhadnetzar replied and said to them: 'Is it true – Shadrakh, Meshakh and Aved-Nego – that you do not worship my god, nor bow down to the idol of gold that I set up? Now, if – when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and all kinds of music – you shall fall and bow down to the idol that I have made – well and good; if you do not bow down – at that moment you shall be cast into the burning furnace, and who is the god that can save you from my hands?' Shadrakh, Meshakh and Aved-Nego answered and said to the king: 'Nevukhadnetzar, we have no need to answer you in this regard. If He so wishes, our G-d Whom we worship can save us from the burning furnace and from your hands, o king; and if not, let it be known to you, o king, that we do not worship your god, nor do we bow down to the idol of gold that you have set up.' Then Nevukhadnetzar was filled with fury, and the appearance of his face changed towards Shadrakh, Meshakh Aved-Nego, and he answered and commanded that the furnace be heated seven times more that it was usually heated. And he commanded the most valiant men of his army to bind Shadrakh, Meshakh and Aved-Nego and to cast them into the burning furnace... And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw these men, over whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was the hair of their heads singed, nor were their garments damaged, nor had the smell of fire passed over them..."

The story of Chanania, Mishael and Azaria (here called Shadrakh, Meshakh and Aved-Nego) represents convincing evidence that Chazal's stories are sometimes borrowed from biblical narratives, since it is almost certain that the source for the second midrash is biblical.

[2] The story of Chanania, Mishael and Azaria opens with a giant golden idol, sixty amot (about twelve stories) high. This was no "tower reaching to the heavens," but rather a huge image of Nevukhadnetzar himself. Such an idol would be an object of great admiration; the king's subjects would gaze at it with their heads bent backwards and their hearts raised towards their "father in heaven." Not to mention them in the same breath, the sight would be reminiscent of Moshe lifting his staff at the top of the mountain, with Bnei Yisrael gazing at the upraised staff and subjugating their hearts to G-d.

At the site of the idol, a concert is performed: AT A SINGLE MOMENT all the musicians begin to play, and at that same moment all the nations, peoples and tongues bow and prostrate themselves. This image cannot but remind us of the story that we read in this week's parasha: "It was that the whole world was of one language and of the same speech" (11:1). However, there is a clear difference between the two stories: the episode of the Tower of Bavel starts off with a single language that ultimately splits into many languages, many nations and many peoples, while Nevukhadnetzar's idol aims to unite the diverse nations, peoples and tongues into a single entity.

Nevukhadnetzar's status is something new to the world: no one before him ever had attained such a position – absolute power over the entire world. A world that is ruled by a king such as Nevukhadnetzar raises a most difficult question of faith: who is the king of the world? Perhaps G-d has truly chosen Nevukhadnetzar?

In the story in the Book of Daniel, Nevukhadnetzar's aim is explicit: he wants to nullify G-d's rule. In the preceding chapter, Nevukhadnetzar dreams of a great idol, its head fashioned from gold, its neck and chest from silver, its abdomen from copper and the lower part of its body from brass. At the end of the dream, G-d's Kingship comes and replaces the idol made from these perishable substances. In response, in the next chapter Nevukhadnetzar has an idol fashioned from pure gold, to show that it is not G-d's Kingship that will replace the idol described in his dream, but rather his own kingship that will last forever.

What we see is a sort of dialogue between

the idol that Nevukhadnetzar sees in his dream, and the idol that he creates. The significance of the dialogue is a battle between G-d and Nevukhadnetzar. G-d appears in his dream as the King of the whole world, but even then Nevukhadnetzar declares that G-d may be King in the dream, but he – Nevukhadnetzar – is king in reality. Instead of an idol that has only a head made of gold, Nevukhadnetzar makes an idol that is fashioned altogether from gold so that people will bow before it and rebel against G-d. Indeed, were it not for Chanania, Mishael and Azaria, he would have succeeded. G-d's agents – representatives of the Jewish nation – stood firm and spoiled Nevukhadnetzar's vision, until ultimately the king himself is forced to acknowledge the truth. At this point G-d's clear victory over the kingship of Nevukhadnetzar finds expression. (In fact, Chazal teach that when he saw how he had been defeated by G-d, Nevukhadnetzar praised and extolled Him to such a degree that the ministering angels wanted to silence him, because no one in the world had ever praised G-d as Nevukhadnetzar was doing at that moment!) Having reviewed the background to the Midrash – the story of Nevukhadnetzar – let us now re-examine the story of the Tower of Bavel and reconstruct Chazal's process of "photomontage" in the story of Avraham. **WHAT'S WRONG WITH UNITY?**

The sin of the generation that built the Tower of Bavel is not stated explicitly in the text. The Torah only describes their initiative: "They said: Let us build for ourselves a city, with a tower reaching up to the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name lest we be scattered over all the earth." (11:4)

The verses convey the impression that the main problem concerned the city that they wanted to build (the city is mentioned in the story more often than the tower, and at the end we read, "So G-d scattered them... and they ceased the build the city"), while Chazal indicate that the fundamental sin of the generation lay in the construction of the tower. Either way, when G-d sees the city and the tower, "G-d said: Behold, they are a single nation and they all have the same language, and this is what they have begun to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them of all that they have planned to do" (11:6). What is it about the unity of the generation that is so bad? Isn't unity – under any circumstances – usually a good sign? **WAR AGAINST GOD?**

While the "literal" commentators (Rashbam, Radak, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and others) explain that the sin lay in the desire to build a tall tower, in the spirit of "great and fortified cities to the sky," Rashi – based on Chazal in the Midrash (Noach Tanchuma 18) – understands the sin as concerning the construction of a tower whose "top reached up to the heavens." In his view, the people of that generation actually wanted to reach the heavens: "They said: He can't just decide to take the upper worlds for Himself and give us the lower! We shall go up to the heavens and strike Him with axes!" Perhaps Chazal base their interpretation on the connotations of the word "tower" (midgal) in Tanakh: it usually indicates a battle fortress and observation point (see especially Divrei ha-Yamim II, chapters 26-27). And if the top of this tower would be in the heavens, then it would be meant for the purposes of waging war against Him Who dwells there. But it is more likely that Chazal's view is based on the linguistic connection between the story of the Tower of Bavel and the preceding story of Nimrod: "Kush bore Nimrod, and he began to be a mighty person in the world. He was a mighty hunter [3] before G-d; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod – a mighty hunter before G-d.' The beginning of his kingdom was Bavel and Erekh and Akad and Kalneh, in the land of Shin'ar. Out of that land came Ashur; he built Niveh and the city of Rechovot and Kelach." (10:8- 11) It appears that the kingdom of Bavel lasted only a short time; this was the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom before he left there (following the episode of the Tower of Bavel). This being the case, we should seek the sin of the kingdom of Bavel – the generation of the Tower of Bavel – in the person of the ruler of that kingdom: Nimrod.

"WHICH THE SONS OF MEN HAVE BUILT"

"Which the sons of men have built" – R. Berakhia said: [Why does it tell us that 'the sons of men' built it?] Would we have thought that the sons of donkeys of camels built it? Rather, they are the sons (i.e. followers) of Adam: just as [he was ungrateful] after all the goodness that I performed for him ... so too, only two years passed from the time of the flood until the generation of the dispersion (i.e. of the Tower of Babel) was born, and [already] 'All the world was of one language....' (Bereishit Rabba 38,9) In this midrash, Chazal teach us that the people of the Tower of Bavel were sinful descendants of a sinful ancestor: they were the children of Adam, who himself sinned against G-d. Taking his lead from this midrash, Ramban interprets the sin of that generation was that of heresy (hinted at in the words, "And make for ourselves a name"): "One who understands the meaning of 'name' will understand their intention, as expressed in their words, 'And make for

ourselves a name,' and know the extent of what they tried to achieve by means of the tower, and understand the entire issue. For they thought up an evil plan, and their punishment – that they were divided into different tongues and dispersed to different lands – was 'measure for measure,' for they were spreading heresy. Their sin was similar to that of their ancestor. It is for this reason that [the Rabbis] interpret, "Which the sons of men have built" – R. Berakhia said: Would we have thought that the sons of donkeys of camels built it? Rather, they are the sons (i.e. followers) of Adam.' Note that in the entire narrative of the flood, G-d is called 'E-lokim,' and in the narrative of the dispersion, He is called by His Unique Name (i.e. the Tetragrammaton). The reason for this is that they were punished in the flood for their corruption, while the dispersion came because of their heresy, and therefore they were punished by G-d's great Name. And this is the meaning of [G-d's] expression 'to go down,' as it was in [the episode of] Sedom. One who is wise will understand this." (Ramban on 11:2) The Ramban fails to explain in what way this generation was heretical, but the wording of G-d's claim against the builders of the tower would seem to lend weight to what the Midrash and Ramban are saying. Following the sin of Adam, we read: "The Lord G-d said: 'BEHOLD, man has become LIKE ONE of us, knowing good and evil; NOW, he might put forth his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat from it and live forever.' So the Lord G-d SENT HIM AWAY from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." (3:22-23) Following the sin of the Tower of Bavel, we read: "G-d said: 'BEHOLD, they are a single nation with ONE language for all, and this is what they have begun to do. NOW nothing will be withheld from them in all that they planned to do' ... so G-d DISPERSED them from there over the entire world, and they ceased to build the city." (11:6-8)

Why is G-d concerned about man's power once he knows good and evil? Rashi (3:22) explains:

"Now perhaps he will put forth his hand' – since he will be immortal, he will likely mislead the world and claim that he, too, is a god."

It is precisely the same danger that existed concerning the generation of the Tower of Bavel, whose project was meant to reach to the heavens. Their king – Nimrod – would sit at the top of the tower, and from his elevated throne in the sky he would rule all of humanity, which was "all one nation and of one tongue," and he would tell them all that he, too, was a god.

"ITS TOP REACHING TO THE HEAVEN" – HOW? According to what we have said above, based on Chazal's interpretation, the expression "a tower reaching to the heavens" is no exaggeration: the people of that generation wanted literally to reach the sky. We must then ask, were they fools? How could they think that they could actually build so high? Throughout Tanakh, "shamayim" (the heavens) refers to the cloud level, the line representing the border between the "upper world" and the "lower world." At the beginning of the story we read of how man discovered bricks and mortar; this enabled them to build taller and better buildings. [4] Constructing a tower that reaches cloud level is not an impossible task. We may assume that at the top of the tower was supposed to be a balcony where Nimrod would sit and look out over his kingdom. All would look upwards to him, while he would gaze upon them from amidst the cloud (together with the rays of the sun that would radiate from around it). The significance of such a position is altogether GODLY. Nimrod's subjects would look up towards the cloud of his glory, passing before him like a flock of sheep. Indeed, descriptions such as this exist in historical records. Various kings ruled over the entire world and attempted – at certain stages – to eternalize their names and become eternal kings (admittedly not through constructing towers, but through other technological means). This was the purpose of the mausoleum in Moscow, which turned Lenin and Stalin into immortal beings; the same phenomenon occurred during the period of Mao-Tse-Tung in Communist China, and Saddam Hussein had the same ambition. All of these are hinted at in Rashi's words, "Since he will be immortal, he will likely mislead the world and claim that he, too, is a god!" **ONE NATION AND A SINGLE TONGUE** From the story of the Tower of Bavel we learn what kind of unity existed in that generation: they all had the same aim. This was not ONE NATION ("am echad"), but rather – as in Stalinist Russia – "A NATION OF ONE" ("am shel echad"). They were not "of A SINGLE TONGUE" ("safa achat"), but rather "of the tongue of one [person]" ("safa shel achat"). The builders were not "OF ONE AIM" ("eitza achat"), but rather "of THE AIM OF ONE" ("etza shel achat") – namely, of Nimrod, the mighty hunter who ruled over them. The collective conscience, the collective initiative and the collective thinking reflected not a unity and harmony of opinion, but rather the brutal and tyrannical coercion of a single individual, who thought and planned on behalf of everyone. This ruler – like other such rulers throughout history – was bloodthirsty; he brought

about the unity of thought and belief in a single idea by means of a terrifying furnace into which anyone who dared think differently would be mercilessly thrown.

If this is the type of unity that is proposed, then division is preferable. Therefore, G-d's response is to disperse them. It is better for all of humanity not to be subjected to the all-encompassing power of a single autocrat; rather, every person and every nation should choose his own ideals.

"THEY LEFT TO GO TO THE LAND OF CANAAN" We are left with one more question: in the story from the Book of Daniel we see how Chanania, Mishael and Azaria spoiled Nevukhadnetzar's plan. Having drawn a parallel between this narrative and that of the Tower of Babel, we are left looking for someone to spoil Nimrod's plan. And who is our candidate? To answer this question, let us examine the end of the story: "Terach lived seventy years and he bore Avram and Nachor and Charan. And these are the generations of Terach: Terach bore Avram and Nachor and Charan, and Charan bore Lot. Charan died before Terach, his father, in the land of his birthplace, in Ur Kasdim. Avram and Nachor took wives; the name of Avram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nachor's wife was Milka, daughter of Charan, the father of Milka and the father of Yiska. Sara was barren; she had no child. Terach took Avram, his son, and Lot the son of Charan, the son of his son, and Sarai – his daughter-in-law, wife of Avram his son, and departed with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan; they went as far as Charan and sojourned there. Terach lived two hundred and five years, and Terach died in Charan." (11:26-32)

It is clear to us from this passage at the end of parashat Noach that the birth of Avram represents a turning point in relation to the ten preceding generations. After the list of ten generations, the Torah suddenly begins to detail a new genealogy: "Terach was seventy years old and he bore Avram and Nachor and Charan. And these are the generations of Terach: Terach bore Avram and Nachor and Charan, and Charan bore Lot." The Torah leaves many questions unanswered: why did Terach behave as he did? Why would a person whose life was based in Ur Kasdim get up and leave his country and birthplace, and head for the land of Canaan? Several hypotheses exist to explain this issue.

Rav Yoel Bin-Nun writes in his article, "The Hebrews and the Land of the Hebrews" [5], that Terach's family was a family of merchants, therefore they wandered from place to place. He maintains that Avram's journey to the land of Canaan was actually a combination of two journeys: it was a continuation of the journey started by Terach, his father, and at the same time a journey at G-d's request ("Go forth..."). Rav Mordekhai Breuer, in his book "Pirkei Bereishit," writes that the Torah gives no explanation for Terach's journey to the land of Canaan because, in truth, it lacked any reason. It was an intuited by them, a product of the Divine spirit inspiring those generations. I reject these explanations, and propose that the juxtaposition of the journey to Canaan with the episode of the Tower of Babel lends support to my claim:

"G-d SCATTERED them from there over all the land, and they ceased to build the city. Therefore its name was called BAVEL, for there G-d mixed up ('balal') the tongue of all the land, AND FROM THERE GOD SCATTERED THEM OVER ALL THE LAND." (11:8-9)

The impression that arises from these verses is that some event took place in the land of Babel, as a result of which everyone was scattered and they wandered to many different places. Indeed, this is told to us explicitly in the story of Nimrod: "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel... FROM THAT LAND ASHUR EMERGED"! For some reason Ashur was forced to leave Babel. The reason, apparently, is the story of the Tower. Just as all the other nations emerged from Babel and wandered to other places, Terach also left Ur Kasdim and set off for Charan.

Let us now try to investigate further the matter of this "scattering." The Torah itself presents the scattering as a punishment for the having built the Tower, but in parashat Ha'azinu we are given a different reason:

"When the Supreme G-d gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He placed the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel." (Devarim 32:8)

This verse reveals another explanation for the dispersion: it was all intended so that Avraham would reach the land of Canaan: "He placed the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel!!"

If we try to combine these two contradictory reasons, we discover that the Torah is describing the two poles of the same idea. At one end we find Nimrod, who wants to rebel against G-d, and at the other end we find Avraham, who calls in G-d's Name. For Nimrod, the dispersion was a punishment: "G-d scattered them from there," while for Avraham this was an instance of Divine Guidance: "He placed the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel."

Avraham, then, is the opposite pole, and it is he who overturns Nimrod's plans. Avraham the Hebrew ("ha-Ivri") is on one side ("ever echad"), while all the rest of

the world – i.e., Nimrod – is on the other side, busy commanding everyone to bow and prostrate themselves to an idol! It is a short step, then, to complete the comparison between the story of Nimrod and that of Nevukhadnetzar, by placing Avraham in the role of Chanania, Mishael and Azaria. "A CLEAR LANGUAGE" Another king built a city with a tower reaching to the heavens:

"I shall sing now to my beloved a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard: my beloved had a vineyard in a fruitful hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted a good vine, and built a tower in its midst..." (Yishayahu 5:1-2)

The "beloved" is the same beloved that we find in Shir ha-Shirim: it is Shelomo, builder of Jerusalem and the Temple. Shelomo did not build with the intention, heaven forefend, of using it as a base to wage war against G-d; on the contrary, he built a house so that G-d would dwell in it. Its stones did not reach the heavens, but its essence and purpose certainly ascended there: "You shall hear the prayer of Your servant and of Your nation, Israel, who will pray towards this place, You will hear all the way to the place of Your dwelling, to the heavens; You will hear and You will forgive." (Melakhim I 8:30) Like Nimrod, Shelomo also wanted to forge all of humanity into a single nation with a single tongue. But unlike Nimrod, he tried to do this not by means of a fiery furnace, by sowing fear and terror, but rather through love:

"It is written, 'King Shelomo loved foreign women.' R. Shimon ben Yochai said: 'He loved them' – literally, i.e., for lewdness. Chanania, the nephew of R. Yehoshua, said: For marriage, as it is written, 'You shall not intermarry with them.' R. Yossi said: To bring them near the words of the Torah and bring them under the wings of the Shekhina." (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 2:6)

Through the covenant of marriage, Shelomo sought to bring the entire world to the "Tower" – the Temple, and to bring them to belief in G-d. Even this unity is not proper in G-d's eyes – though it came not from fear but rather from love. Therefore, Shelomo himself was punished with dispersion: the division of the kingdom, with "Each man to your tents, O Israel."

This unity was not successful because boundaries and levels became blurred owing to the urge towards immorality. But that hoped-for unity will come about – not out of immorality nor out of murderous intentions, out of a reign of terror. This unity – when it happens – will be in accordance with the vision of the prophet Tzefania, who witnessed Nevukhadnetzar's rise to power and who presented a religious alternative:

"Then I shall make all the nations into a clear tongue, to call out – all of them – in G-d's Name, to serve him together." (Tzefania 3:9)

Indeed, the world is destined to speak a single language and to be of the same words, with all the nations and tongues gathered around a single Tower, all coming to Jerusalem to bow before the King, G-d of Hosts. Then "G-d will be King over all the world; on that day G-d will be One and His Name – One" (Zekharia 14:9). NOTES: [1] The text hints here at a misdeed on Gidon's part: since he did not go down to the camp alone, he did not merit to have the miracle performed through himself alone.

[2] An interesting addendum connecting Nimrod (who threw Avraham into the furnace) and Nevukhadnetzar: certain sources identify "Shmiramit" as the wife of Nevukhadnetzar, while Tzemach David, and other scholars, assert that she was the wife of Nimrod.

[3] A "mighty hunter" does not mean a person who brings the greater part of his booty home. It is an expression familiar to us from Esav, who was "a hunting man, a man of the field": it refers to a man who went about at the head of a band of four hundred men, and who – according to Chazal – would kidnap women from their husbands, rape them, and transgress five grave transgressions on a single day.

[4] Stone buildings are of lesser quality, since stone is heavier and the bonding substance makes it impossible to build several floors. A discussion in Bava Batra 3a concerns building materials and how their quality influences the height of buildings.

[5] Published in "Megadim" 15, 5752. Translated by Kaeren Fish

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RABBI AARON ROSS' CHABURA-NET THE NOACHIDE LAW OF JUSTICE

The gemara in Sanhedrin 56a tells us that the Bnei Noach (a term that generally refers to the nations of the world other than the Jews) were given seven commandments - not to kill, not to have illicit relations, not to worship idolatry, not to steal, not to defame the name of G-d, not to eat a limb off of a live animal, and "dinim." The last commandment literally means "laws" or "just laws," and it is the exact definition of this law that is the focus of our Chabura this week.

In analyzing this law, we must first be aware of the main section in the Torah which involves the laws of Bnei Noach. In Bereishit 34 we are told the story of Dina, who was kidnapped and raped by the Canaanite prince Shechem. When her brothers Shimon and Levi heard what had happened, they convinced Shechem to convince his subjects to circumcise themselves, ostensibly for the purpose of joining the two nations, and thus allowing Shechem to keep Dina. When the inhabitants of the city had all agreed to do so and were in considerable pain following their operations, Shimon and Levi killed every male in the city and took back Dina. Yaakov, their father, horrified and what occurred, rebuked his sons for their actions, both at this point and in his final words and blessings to his children. For our purposes, we want to assume that Shimon and Levi acted within the law, and thus we must find some reason why they had the right to wipe out the town of Shechem, while at the same time finding a reason why Yaakov found fault with their actions.

Rambam (Hil. Melachim 9:14) claims that the commandment of dinim refers to an obligation for Bnei Noach to establish courts in every city and jurisdiction for the purpose of enforcing the other six laws. Thus, the people of Shechem were held responsible for the fact that they watched their prince steal Dina and did nothing to stop him. The Chasdei David sharpens this point by noting that Rambam seems to place this obligation of justice on everyone and not just on the rulers or the judges. Several Rishonim question this last point, asking why the judges would not have been the ones responsible, since it was their place to carry out the laws and punish Shechem. Ran answers that they had a status of oneis, i.e. they could not prosecute him since his position gave him power over their lives. The Ohr HaChaim invokes the general principle that a king is not judged (see Sanhedrin 18a), and thus while the judges were free from their obligation based on this technicality, the people still had an obligation to stop Shechem from abducting Dina. Rav Shach, in his Avi Ezri, notes on this point that the real commandment of dinim is "to judge," and the appointing of judges is merely a suggestion as to how this commandment can be carried out. As such, the judges were mere objects of the commandment and the obligation was in fact incumbent on all of the people.

Ramban, in his commentary to Genesis, strongly objects to the view of Rambam. He claims that if the view of Rambam were correct, then Yaakov himself should have killed the people of Shechem (a Ben Noach who violates one of his seven laws incurs the death penalty in all cases) and certainly should not have rebuked his children for their actions. Thus, says Ramban, the commandment is actually of a different nature. In reality, the commandment of dinim is an expansive one that includes many aspects of the civil code, and parenthetically it includes the need to set up courts. However, under this construct the people of Shechem did not really violate this commandment. Rather, Shimon and Levi used the fact that the people of Shechem were idolaters as a pretext for killing them, and Yaakov's opposition stemmed from the fact that he did not feel that it was the duty of his children to be the police force for the world.

How do we approach this argument between Rambam and Ramban? Beyond the fact that each one has to design their own way of interpreting

the story of Dina, is there a deeper level to their argument, a level that will bring us to a better understanding of the nature of this law? There obviously is, and to see it in a clearer light, we must first highlight the differences between their opinions a bit more. First, we must ask if there is a specific commandment for Bnei Noach to appoint judges. According to Rambam, that is the whole commandment of dinim, while according to Ramban there is no such commandment, but rather it is merely a logical outgrowth of the need to have a civil code. The reverse of this is that according to Rambam, there is no obligation for Bnei Noach to have an enforceable civil code, but rather the judges are charged with protecting merely the other six laws. The Lechem Mishne objects to this, showing that this view of Rambam is inconsistent with much of the continuation of the gemara in Sanhedrin.

A second approach is outlined by Ramo in a responsa (#10). He claims that both sides agree that there is a responsibility to judge monetary matters and civil issues. However, for Rambam, this falls under the heading of the prohibition to steal, while for Ramban this is the commandment of dinim. He bases this analysis on the argument in the gemara over which word in Bereishit 2:16 serves as the basis for the law of dinim. According to the view that the word "va-yetzav" (and He commanded) is the source, the law of dinim is merely for Bnei Noach to have a court system, but what laws they enforce will be decided, to some extent, by their sovereigns. However, according to the view that the word "Elokim" is the source, the commandment includes all of the Jewish civil code as well, as that word has the implication of Hashem as judge. The Chatam Sofer (responsa 6:14) rejects this notion of Ramo as irrelevant to the debate. He claims that according to the view of Rambam, the people of Shechem were liable to the death penalty even though there was no court that could actually carry out that punishment. Thus, Shimon and Levi were theoretically justified in their actions, and Yaakov's rebuke stemmed from his disagreeing to their assumption of the role of enforcers.

What, then, is the actual commandment of dinim? Taking the views of the Avi Ezri and the Chatam Sofer together, we arrive at the notion that there is a mitzvah for Bnei Noach to judge, and if they fail to carry out this commandment they are subject to the death penalty. What is the nature of this law? According to Meiri, Bnei Noach are charged with preventing perversion and corruption in society and thus with the upkeep of the world. Rashi refers to their obligation as one of "justice." The key here, as explained by the responsa Sho'el U'Meishiv, is that while they have this responsibility, and while they can perhaps be punished for failing to execute it, their failure to do so does not create any liability in Heaven. What is meant by that is that when a Jew sins, not only does he have to face certain delineated consequences in this world, but his sin also makes an indelible mark on his soul and his entire existence. A Ben Noach does not have to deal with such metaphysical notions - he is charged with safeguarding the world, and his not doing so hurts him only insofar as he has "let the world down."

Using this model, we can perhaps explain several differences between the laws of Bnei Noach and those of the Jews. The first is with regard to fines. While fines are, in one sense, monetary civil matters, they are treated differently even within Jewish law. For example, a court outside of the Land of Israel may not enforce any of the fines laid out in the Torah. In a similar vein, even if Bnei Noach are obligated in our civil laws, they are not obligated to enforce these fines (e.g. paying 50 silver pieces for rape, paying four times the value of a stolen and slaughtered ox, etc.), as the fines are not "natural" monetary obligations, but exist rather as decrees of Hashem that apply only to the Jews when they are in their privileged position of being in Israel. The second difference is one pointed out by the responsa Machaneh Chaim. The gemara in Sanhedrin notes that there are various laws of courtroom procedure that do not apply to Bnei Noach, such as the requirement for two witnesses, the restriction against a relative testifying, and so on. Why is this so? If these

statues exist seemingly for the purpose of guaranteeing as fair a trial as possible, why would we exempt Bnei Noach from them? Again, we must realize that the obligation of a Ben Noach in dinim stems ultimately from the power that their ruler has and not directly from Hashem. As they lack that "higher authority" to answer to, we can be lenient with them in defining such aspects of their requirements.

A third difference is the subject of debate between the Yerushalmi and the Chatam Sofer. The Yerushalmi claims that a Ben Noach judge may not be bribed, just as a Jewish judge may not be. The Chatam Sofer offers a fascinating explanation as to why the opposite may be true. He claims that if a Jew is on trial before a non-Jewish judge and he sees that the judge may wrongly sentence him to death, he may bribe the judge to reverse the decision. Why is this so? Since the obligation of the non-Jew is to execute proper and correct justice, then by letting him hand down his wrong decision, the Jew is allowing the judge to violate one of the seven commandments, i.e. that of dinim. Thus, to save him from this violation, the Jew may bribe the judge (note: as far as I know, we do not follow this view, so please do not start bribing judges with reckless abandon).

Finally, we can explain why a Ben Noach is punished with death for violating any of their commandments, whereas a Jew who performs a similar infraction does not always receive such a harsh punishment. Since the Ben Noach is given these commandments to uphold the world, by not following them he has contributed to the breakdown of society and the world at large. As such, he has already removed himself from the world, and his responsible position in it, and the resultant death penalty is merely a natural outgrowth and expression of his actions.

SALT!! ("Surf A Little Torah")

RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

<http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/salt-bereishit/02-4noach.htm>

PARASHAT NOACH

Parashat Noach recounts the deluge and its aftermath. Recall that after the flood, Noah became intoxicated and exposed himself, at which point two of his three sons, Shem and Yefet, respectfully clothed their father to save him from further embarrassment. Rashi (9:23) writes that Shem "exhibited particular zeal for the mitzva," and therefore his descendants earned a special mitzva related to clothing - tzitzit.

The use of the word "mitzva" in this context suggests that the formal mitzva of "kibbud av v'em" - honoring one's parents - applied to Shem and Yefet, despite their not having been considered Jews. A similar implication arises from the story in Masekhet Kiddushin (31a) of the gentle Dama Ben Netina, who received immense reward for his diligent observance of this mitzva. Furthermore, the Rambam (Hilkhos Mamrim 5:11) writes that although a convert to Judaism loses all former familial relationships, he may nevertheless not smite, curse, or insult his parents. Such conduct would lead outsiders to scorn Judaism, observing that this individual previously afforded honor to his parents and suddenly, upon his acceptance of Judaism, does not. Clearly, this reasoning assumes that gentiles must honor their parents.

The obvious question, of course, is why this obligation did not make its way into the list of "mitzvot bnei Noach" ("Noachide Laws"), those mitzvot applicable to Jews and non-Jews alike.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe 2:130) answers that, in fact, gentiles are not obligated in the formal mitzva of honoring parents that applies to the Jewish people. They are, however, obligated in the fundamental precept of "hakarat hatov" - showing gratitude, a universal value. Needless to say, anyone with a sense of appreciation for kindness bestowed upon him would display a considerable level of respect towards his parents, who gave him his life and went through the trouble of rearing him. Therefore, although the specific laws of "kibbud av v'em" do not apply to non-Jews, they must nevertheless honor their parents

whereas they are included in the universal obligation of showing gratitude.

(Taken from Rav Binyamin Tabory's column, "Hamitzva Baparasha" in Shabbat B'Shabbato, Parashat Noach 5760.)

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago]

Noah Noah, Faith and Risk

NOAH IS ONE OF THE MOST TANTALISING FIGURES in the Torah, and nowhere is this more evident than in the first and last glimpses we catch of him in the sedra that bears his name. The opening is full of expectation:

Noah was a righteous man, faultless in his generation. Noah walked with G-d (6:9)

No one else in the Torah receives such accolades: not Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, not Joseph or Moses or Joshua. Yet the last scene of his life is full of pathos:

Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backwards and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. (9:20-23).

The decorousness of Shem and Japheth's behaviour cannot hide from us the embarrassment they felt at knowing that their father - the sole human being worthy of rescue during the flood - had become a drunkard. How had a man so great fallen so low? That is the question to which the sages of the midrash sought an answer. There are many comments, but one is surpassing in its sharpness:

Once the waters had abated, Noah should have left the ark. However, Noah said to himself, "I entered with G-d's permission, as it says, 'Go into the ark' (7:1). Shall I now leave without permission? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Is it permission, then, that you are seeking? Very well, then, here is permission,' as it is said [Then G-d said to Noah,] 'Come out of the ark.'"

Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai said: If I had been there I would have broken down the ark and taken myself out. (Tanhuma, Buber, Noah, 13-14)

TO UNDERSTAND THIS MIDRASH one has to read the story of the Flood carefully, with an ear to the pace of the narrative. The story begins rapidly. G-d announces the imminent destruction of life on earth. He orders Noah to build an ark, specifying its precise measurements. Details follow as to what he must bring with him - his family, two (or in the case of pure animals, seven) of all the species of life, and provisions. The rain comes; the earth is flooded; Noah and those with him are the sole survivors. The rain ceases and the water abates. We expect to read next that Noah emerges. Instead the narrative slows down and for fourteen verses almost nothing happens. The water recedes. The ark comes to rest. Noah opens a window and sends out a raven. Then he sends out a dove. He waits seven days and sends it out again. It returns with an olive leaf. Another seven days pass. He sends the dove a third time. This time it does not return, but Noah still does not step out onto dry land. Eventually G-d himself says, 'Come out of the ark.' Only then does Noah do so. The Midrash is quite unmistakable in its note of exasperation. When it comes to rebuilding a shattered world, you do not wait for permission.

What does Noah say to G-d when the decree is issued that the world is about to perish? What does he say when he is told to make an ark to save himself and his family? What does he say as the rain begins to fall? The answer is: nothing. During the whole sequence of events, Noah is not reported as saying a single word. Instead we read, four times, of his silent obedience: "Noah did everything just as G-d had commanded him" (6:22). "And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him" (7:5). He brought pairs of animals into the ark "as G-d had commanded Noah" (7:9, 16). Noah is the paradigm of biblical obedience. He does as he is commanded. What his story tells us is that obedience is not enough.

THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENON. It is reasonable to assume that in the life of faith, obedience is the highest virtue. In Judaism it is not. One of the strangest features of biblical Hebrew is that - despite the fact that the Torah contains 613 commands - there is no word for 'obey.' Instead the verb the Torah uses is *shema/lishmoa*, 'to listen, hear, attend, understand, internalise, respond.' So distinctive is this word that, in effect, the King James Bible had to invent an English equivalent, the word 'hearken.' Nowadays the word has gone out of circulation, and there is no precise translation. Equally, modern Hebrew had to invent a word to mean pure, unquestioning obedience. It chose *letzayot* - not *lishmoa* which means something else, reflective response. In Judaism, G-d does not command blind obedience. Ein haKadosh Barukh Hub ba be-tirunyah im beriyotav; 'G-d does not deal despotically with His creatures' (Avodah Zarah 3a). If He sought no more than mindless submission to the Divine will, He would have created robots, machines, or genetically programmed people who responded automatically to commands as dogs to Pavlov's bell. G-d wants us to be mature, deliberative, to do His will because we understand or because we trust Him when we do not understand. He seeks from us something other and greater than obedience, namely responsibility.

Intuitively, the sages understood that the hero of faith was not Noah but Abraham - Abraham who fought a war to rescue his nephew, who prayed for the people of the plain even though he knew they were wicked; Abraham who challenged heaven itself in words unrivalled in the history of the human encounter with G-d: "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" What might an Abraham not have said when confronted with the possibility of a flood. "What of there are fifty righteous people? What if there are ten? Far be it from You to do such a thing - to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike." Abraham might have saved the world. Noah saved only himself and his family. Abraham might have failed, but Noah - at least on the evidence of the text - did not even try (to be sure, there are midrashic traditions that he did try, but most prefer to accept that he did not). Noah's end - drunk, dishevelled, an embarrassment to his children - eloquently tells us that if you save yourself while doing nothing to save the world, you do not even save yourself. Noah could not live with the guilt of survival.

The difference between Noah and Abraham is eloquently summarised by the midrashic comment of Rabbi Yehudah:

"Noah walked with G-d." The meaning of this phrase can be understood by a parable. A king had two sons, one grown up, the other a child. To the child, he said: Walk with me. But to the adult son he said: Walk before me. So it was that to Abraham, G-d said: "Because you are wholehearted, walk before Me" (Bereishith 17:1). But of Noah, the Torah says that he "walked with G-d." (Bereishith Rabbah 30:10)

It takes courage to rebuild a shattered world. That was the courage shown by those who built and fought for the State of Israel in the years after the Holocaust. It was the same kind of courage that led the handful of survivors from the East European yeshivot and Hassidic groups, to reconstruct their devastated worlds of learning and piety in Israel, the United States and elsewhere. They were different kinds of people but they shared that intuitive knowledge that Noah lacked: that when it comes to rebuilding the ruins of catastrophe, you do not wait for

permission. You take the risk and walk ahead. Faith is more than obedience. It is the courage to create.

From: torahweb@torahweb.org Sent: October 13, 2004
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RABBI YAAKOV HABER ISH HA'ADAMA VS. ISH ELOKIM: PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHESSED

Many commentators have contrasted Noah's introverted righteousness focusing on personal religious growth, not praying for the salvation of his generation, and not rebuking them for their wrongdoing with Avraham's extroverted righteousness convincing others of the truth of monotheism and of an ethical lifestyle, praying for the salvation of even the wicked S'dom and its sister cities, and rebuking Avimelech and others for their wrongdoing with the goal of changing them for the better (see "The Spiritual Legacy of Noah and Avraham" - TorahWeb.org, 1999 - by Rav Michael Rosensweig for a fascinating exposition of the contrast between these two individuals.) B'raishit Rabba (36:3) further contrasts Noah with Moshe. Noah enters history's stage being described as "Ish Tzaddik" (Noah 6:9), a righteous man, the appellation by which he is crowned as he is chosen to be the sole builder of a new, better world. He exits as an "Ish Ha'Adama" (9:20), a man of the earth, or an earthy man, the title by which he is called before he falls into a drunken stupor after planting a vineyard and producing wine. Moshe, on the other hand, toward the beginning of his life is referred to as "Ish Mitzri" (Sh'mos 2:19) and exits before granting his final blessing to K'lal Yisrael as an "Ish Elokim" (V'Zos HaBracha 33:1), a man of G-d.

Meshech Chochma provides an insightful exposition of this Midrash. One would have expected Noah's emphasis on religious self-growth to lead to sustained righteousness throughout his life. Instead, the opposite occurred. One would have expected Moshe's constant involvement with others -- his seeking out the plight of his brethren in Egypt, his risking his life to save a fellow Jew, his saving the daughters of Yisro and their flock of sheep from the shepherds who chased them away from the well, his constant prayer for the salvation of K'lal Yisrael even to the point of his willingness to give up his own life rather than witness the destruction of his beloved nation -- to hamper his religious growth. Instead, he develops as the highest level prophet possible soaring above those who preceded and succeeded him. Sustained religious growth is not solely due to one's effort at self-perfection. It is granted as a gift from Hashem largely in response to and in proportion with one's involvement with the needs of others, the level being reached far transcending that which would have been possible by the investment in time and effort of the individual himself. This remains a paradox of religious devotion. Taking away time from self contemplation, study and efforts at perfection to help others often leads to greater levels of piety than would have ordinarily been possible. Not surprisingly, Avraham Avinu establishes the paradigm of "G'dola hachnassas 'orchim mei'hakbalas p'nei ha'Sh'china," "Welcoming guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence."

Chasam Sofer expresses a similar notion in his analysis of the passage introducing Hashem's telling Avraham about the imminent destruction of S'dom. "HaM'chase 'Ani mei'Avraham 'asher 'ani 'oseh. V'Avraham hoyo yihye l'goy gadol... 'asher ytzave es banav v'es beiso acharav ... la'asos t'zdaka umishpat..." "Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am about to do. And Avraham will become a great nation ... he will instruct his children and household concerning the ways of charity and justice" (VaYeira 18:17-18). The p'sukim imply that there would have been a reason to withhold this prophecy from Avraham, but Hashem did not since Avraham would inform his children of the ways of charity and justice. The Chasam Sofer suggests that since Avraham Avinu was so involved in outreach to others, he did not have the time normally necessary to prepare himself spiritually for the reception of prophecy. Nonetheless, since he acted for the sake of Heaven in giving to others, Hashem granted him the prophecy as a gift.

It has been suggested that for a similar reason, Moshe is referred to as "Ish Elokim" precisely at the end of his life before he blessed the B'nei Yisrael. Moshe was denied entry into the Holy Land he desired to enter his whole life ultimately because of the complaints of the Jewish People at Mei M'riva which led to his transgression for which his punishment was to die in the desert. Yet, Moshe, rather than holding a grudge against his nation, and rebuking them severely at the end of his life, blaming them for his misery, blesses them! This supreme act of chessed, focusing on K'lal Yisrael's future happiness and not his own sorrow earns him the title of Ish Elokim.

On a cautionary note, engaging immediately in reaching out to others before significantly developing oneself spiritually can often lead to not having enough to give or even to spiritual disappointment and disillusionment. The balance between personal religious growth and helping others is a complex one and depends on myriad factors. Nevertheless, the emphasis on giving of our time, knowledge and sympathies to others at the right time and place, as demonstrated by our great leaders, should serve as an inspiring example for all of us to follow. Copyright © 2004 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

From: Shlomo Katz [skatz@torah.org] Sent: October 14, 2004 To: hamaayan@torah.org

Subject: HaMaayan / The Torah Spring - Parashat Noach

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz

Noach: Back to the Daily Grind Volume 19, No. 2 1 Cheshvan 5765 October 16, 2004 Sponsored this week by Yael and Ephraim Sobol, in loving memory of their father, Shlomo Mordechai ben Yaakov Sobol. Mrs. Esther Liberman and family in memory of husband and father Yaakov Azriel ben Aharon David a"h Yitzchok and Barbara Lehman Siegel and family on the yahrzeits of uncle Raphael ben Avraham a"h (Abe Firestein) (18 Tishrei) and grandmother Chana bat Yitzchak a"h (Annie Siegel) (Simchat Torah)

...
"Noach walked with G-d." (6:9)

Regarding the Patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov - we read (24:40), "[G-d] before whom I walked," and (48:16), "G-d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked." What is the difference between walking with G-d, as Noach did, and before G-d, as the Patriarchs did?

Also, we are commanded (Devarim 13:5), "After Hashem, your G-d, you shall walk." What does this mean? Rashi indicates that walking with G-d is a lower level than walking before G-d; presumably, then, walking after G-d is an even lower level. Why does the Torah command us to walk after G-d?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains:

Following Adam's sin, mankind's mission has been to rectify the spiritual damage that he caused. For reasons of His own, G-d does not desire that the damage be corrected all at once. Rather, it is a gradual process. Similarly, G-d reveals Himself only gradually, a little bit in each generation in proportion to that generation's share in repairing the damage that Adam's sin caused.

Walking "with" G-d, as Noach did, means serving G-d on the level demanded from one's own generation. Noach served G-d perfectly to the extent that was expected of him, but he made no impression outside of his particular "area" of service. In contrast, Avraham walked "before" G-d, i.e., he was not content to fulfill his duty and no more. Avraham sought to expand his sphere of influence to both the wayward members of his own generations and to his descendants. Avraham sought to rectify a greater portion of the damage Adam had done than Avraham's generation was expected to rectify.

But we can speak of a gradual rectification of the sin only before the Torah was given. One could set a goal to do more than his share only before Hashem gave us the tool - the Torah - to rectify everything. With the tool that we have, we had the ability to return the world to its perfect state a long time ago. (Indeed, this was almost accomplished at the time of the Giving of the Torah, before the Golden Calf was made.) Since then, we are playing "catch-up," and that is why the best we can be commanded is to walk "after" G-d. (Midbar Shur: Drush 13)

"Two of each shall come to you to keep alive." (6:20)

"Of every kosher animal take unto you seven pairs." (7:2) Why did the non-kosher animals and birds come to the Ark of their own accord, while Noach had to gather the kosher animals?

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) answers: Since some of the kosher animals were destined to be offered as sacrifices, G-d did not decree that they should come to Noach of their own accord. R' Simcha Mordechai Ziskind Broide z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) elaborates further: G-d created animals with the instinct for self-preservation. This is an element the "yashrut" / "justice, fairness and integrity" with which Hashem created the world; i.e., it is only fair that every creature have the instinct to preserve its own life. It was that instinct that drove two animals of each species to go to Noach and obtain a space on the Ark.

However, the instinct for self-preservation could not drive the kosher animals to the Ark, since going to the Ark meant eventual death for some of them. It is true, observes R' Broide, that these animals would preserve their lives for a full year by being in the Ark rather than outside, in the flood waters. Nevertheless, it would not

have been yashar for Hashem to implant in the animals an urge to go to their own deaths. (Hayashar Ve'hatov p.9)

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From: RABBI BEREL WEIN [rbwein@torah.org] Sent: October 14, 2004

To: rabbiwein@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Wein - Noach

Parsha October 15, 2004 NOACH <http://rabbiwein.com/column-826.html>

The main theme of this parsha is that unity in the cause of evil is a terrible vice. The generation of the flood found only one dissenting voice to its program of licentiousness, robbery and oppression. That voice, Noach, was weak and ineffective in turning the people away from conforming to the will of the majority in creating a totally evil society. Unanimity usually is a result of conformity and conformity for the sake of conformity is hardly a virtue. Eastern Europe is just emerging from the grey pallor of conformity that was the hallmark of Communist rule. 99.5% majorities won elections and everyone hailed the Leader, the Party, and the Brave New World, which bore no resemblance to the actuality of life under tyrannical rule. As much as we desire and treasure unity of purpose and people, a unity which demands conformity is a negative feature in human society. The conformity of the generation of the flood led to its annihilation.

The second example of uniformity as a negative in society that the parsha describes is the uniformity of the generation of the Tower of Babel. Everyone spoke the same language and everyone had the same thoughts. A society that was brainwashed into conformity had "few things to say." It was as though the whole world of that time was the North Korea of today. This time the Lord chose not to destroy that generation but rather to force it to divest its rigid conformity. A different language, a different culture, different ideas, different strokes for different folks, all of this was part of G-d's plan for humanity. The Talmud teaches us "dispersion of an evil society is a boon for that society and for the world generally." An Abraham could not have arisen and been successful in introducing the then radical idea of monotheism to the world if there was only one language, one ruler, and one conformist society. The Heavenly Father is hard-pressed to be appreciated in a society of Big Brother. And thus the dispersion of the people of the generation of the Tower of Babel is to be seen as a most positive development in the evolution of human civilization.

The rabbis in the Talmud stated, "Just as no two human beings are ever exactly alike physically, so too no two human beings ever share exactly the same opinions and thoughts [about life and events]." The rabbis were not complaining about this state of affairs. They were merely pointing out the reality of the human condition. Thus they saw unity of purpose for good causes - those advocated by the Torah and Jewish tradition - as a positive goal to be achieved. But they warned us not to confuse unity of purpose with conformity of thought and style. Conformity is an outer feature of life - everyone dressed the same and apparently behaving in like fashion - while unity is more a matter of the heart and soul, of the inner self of the Jew. We should never forget the role of our father Abraham - the prophet called him, "one, unique" - in rejecting conformity and advancing the true unity of G-d and man, of society and the Jewish people, in the pursuit of goodness, justice and kindness towards all. The parsha of Noach should obviously be seen as the introduction to the story of Abraham and of the unique nation in the world that he founded - Israel.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Oct 14, 2004

PENINIM ON THE TORAH
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM
Parshas Noach

And he departed with them from Uhr Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan. (11:31) Rashi earlier (11:28) relates that Avraham Avinu left Uhr Kasdim when he was miraculously spared from death after being thrown into a fiery caldron by King Nimrod. Terach, Avraham's father, complained to the evil king that his son had smashed all of the idols in his store. In Pirkei Avos 5:3, this miracle is considered one of the Asarah Nisyonos, Ten Trials, over which Avraham Avinu triumphed. Rashi cites Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, who concurs. It is, therefore, surprising that when the Rambam enumerates the Ten Trials, he does not include Avraham's preparedness to die for his beliefs. Does this act of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, not warrant recognition?

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, derives from here that for Avraham the challenge to deny Hashem's existence was not a test. It is understood that this was an ideal for which he would gladly suffer and even die. It is related about Horav Shimshon, zl, m'Ostropolia, who died at the hands of gentiles in a most cruel and heinous manner: When he was asked during his final ordeal how he felt, he responded, "I feel nothing." Similarly, Rabbi Akiva went to his painful death at the hands of the Romans with total joy.

A nisayon is a challenge which is enigmatic, yet a person overcomes the challenge with equanimity, because of his deep abiding faith in the Almighty. To agree to worship a graven image, however, was so beyond Avraham Avinu's mindset, that it was not a nisayon for him. His conviction was unequivocal, and his faith unshakable. Indeed, the great tzaddikim, righteous Jews of every generation, followed in the footsteps of their ancestor to the point that dying Al Kiddush Hashem, by sanctifying Hashem's Name, was not considered to be a trial for them. In fact, these individuals viewed Kiddush Hashem as a z'chus, privilege.

The Ostrovitzer Rebbe, zl, garbed in his kittel and tallis, confronted the Nazis in Zusmir in the winter of 1943, prior to being shot, exclaiming, "For some time now, I have anticipated this z'chus of Kiddush Hashem. I am prepared!" The Shedlowitzer Rebbe, zl, comforted those packed into the cattle cars without food and water on a four day trip to the death camp, saying, "Fellow Jews, do not fear death. To die Al Kiddush Hashem is a great privilege."

Horav Mendele Alter, zl, the brother of the Gerrer Rebbe, was among a group of Jews in Treblinka during the summer of 1942 who were ordered to undress. Realizing these were his last few moments on earth, the Rebbe pleaded desperately for a glass of water. A Jewish guard, who was regrettably infamous for his cruelty to his fellow Jews, was moved by the plea. He provided the water, thinking that the Rebbe wanted to quench his thirst before he was killed. Instead, the Rebbe washed his hands, as an act of purification prior to Kiddush Hashem. He then urged his followers, "Fellow Jews, let us say Viddui, confessional, before we die."

The Piazesner Rebbe, zl, observes that he who is murdered Al Kiddush Hashem does not suffer at all. He explains that a person, in anticipation of this unique opportunity, is stimulated to such a degree of ecstasy that he numbs his senses from experiencing any pain. May Hashem bless us to be able to sanctify His Name in our daily lives, so that His honor and glory will be manifest in the way we live.

And as for you, take yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to yourself, that it shall be as food for you and for them. (6:21)

A number of ambiguities are manifest in this pasuk. First, why does it say, "Take for yourself"? Why does it not simply say, "Take food." Second, at the end of the pasuk, it states, "It shall be as food for you and for them," Is that not obvious? Why else would he be gathering food? Third, the pasuk begins with instructions for Noach to gather food for himself and ends, "It shall be as food for you and for them." Last, the Torah concludes by saying that Noach followed Hashem's instructions, presumably by bringing all of the necessary food into the Ark. What is so praiseworthy about this? Clearly, he had to bring in the food or they would all have starved to death.

The Shach and the Tiferes Yehonasan both explain that had Hashem demanded Noach to supply food for all the "passengers" of the Ark for an entire year, it would have been impossible to fulfill His command. In fact, one hundred arks would have been insufficient to provide the necessary space to warehouse such a great amount. Apparently, Hashem provided Noach with a great miracle. He first commanded him to gather enough food only for himself. He blessed that food, so that there was a never-ending supply of rations left over for all the animals, beasts and fowl aboard the Ark. Since a Heavenly blessing must have something tangible to rest on, Noach had originally to provide food for himself. The rest would appear miraculously. We now understand the sequence of the pasuk. Noach was first to

gather food for himself, which Hashem would ultimately bless to provide sustenance for himself and for them. Hashem praised Noach for his trust and faith in Him, relying on the minimal amount of food to be the medium upon which Hashem's blessing would engender food for all the Ark's passengers for an entire year.

One who believes in Hashem does not require great material abundance. Whatever he has serves as the source and springboard for blessing. The Brisker Rav, zl, once related the following story about a young girl who was a chozeres b'teshuvah, had recently become observant. Her parents were vehemently against her decision. Thus, everything that she did had to be performed in the utmost secrecy. The young girl was subject to constant derision, as her parents did everything in their power to undermine her beliefs and to impede her spiritual development. They had a hardware store which was open seven days each week. One weekend, the parents told their daughter that they were taking a vacation and that she would be in charge of the store for Shabbos.

Erev Shabbos, she went to the store and did everything possible to enable her to remain open on Shabbos without having to desecrate its sanctity. She unlocked the door and left the lights on. When she arrived at the store on Shabbos morning, she began to recite Tehillim, with the hope that no customers would appear. All day, no one showed up to purchase anything. She began to get nervous. Her parents would certainly not believe her assertion that there had been no customers. They would probably claim that she had never opened the store.

Shortly before sundown, a man came to the store searching for a specific gadget. It was a simple dollar item that he had not been able to find anywhere else. When he came to the girl and inquired about the price, she became disconcerted. What could she do? She could not allow him to purchase the gadget. She told him the gadget cost five hundred dollars, truly an outrageous amount of money for such a simple device. The man was in great need of the device, so he began to haggle over the price. He left and returned a number of times, until he finally agreed to pay the asking price. What could she do now?

She told the customer that she could not sell him the gadget for another half-hour, after which Shabbos would be over. When Shabbos ended, she was filled with excitement that she had not been mechalel Shabbos, had not desecrated the Shabbos. She told the customer why she had raised the price, asserting that she would now sell it to him for the regular price of one dollar. The man, a paragon of integrity, countered that once he had reconciled himself to spend the higher sum, he would not go back on his word. The girl had kept Shabbos and, in the end, had even made a healthy profit.

When her parents returned, she related to them the entire episode that had occurred. "You probably would never have made so much money had you been open on Shabbos. I was able to keep Shabbos and still earn a huge profit," she told her parents. The parents were moved by her piercing words and eventually became baalei teshuvah themselves. When one believes in Hashem, he eventually sees his hopes realized.

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