

Parshat Noah: Architect of the Ark

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The Torat Yoshiyahu asks, why didn't Hashem save Noah miraculously? Why did he need to build an Ark? Rashi explains that Hashem wanted the people to question Noah as to the purpose of this structure and then they would hopefully repent. The B'Mikroei Shemo asks, why did Hashem not command Noah to call out to the population about the impending destruction as Yonah did in Nineveh? Why the need for 120 years of work? He points out that although both were guilty of thievery and other sins, the generation of the flood was corrupt through and through. When the flaw is deep within one's character, there is no repair, but when the character remains somewhat pure in spite of the sins, repentance and repair are possible. Nineveh's character was not corrupt to its core and could therefore repent, as it did. Nevertheless, writes the Tiv Hatorah, Hashem still hoped that perhaps a physical manifestation of the awaiting danger would prompt the generation of the flood to do teshuvah.

Rabbi Pinto asks, if miracles are meant to appear somewhat natural, why do we read about open miracles throughout the Torah? Where the miracles were glaringly obvious, the people involved went beyond the call of duty and Hashem responded in kind. Noah, on the other hand, did only what was required, not even praying for his people. Therefore, Hashem too responded with only the minimal, natural ways of survival. This idea is validated in Tehillim 121, "Hashem tzilcha al yad yeminecha - Hashem is your shade (your shadow) on your right hand." Just as a shadow responds directly in proportion to

one's actions, so does Hashem respond to us in proportion to our actions. Rabbi Yanky Tauber offers a beautiful insight based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. When we recite the Shema, we say, "me'odecha." The true translation of meod is "very" or "more so". In other words, we should strive to go beyond what we perceive as our limitations, and reach for a higher, better self. The very letters of MeOD are an acronym for ODoM, Man, who through his perseverance and self sacrifice can go far beyond what he thought he was capable of doing. When a person extends himself, he has the power to infuse physical objects with supernatural energy, writes Rabbi Shmuelewitz.

The bronze Nikanor gates were a gift from the wealthy Nikanor to the Temple complex. They were fashioned in Egypt, and Nikanor himself accompanied them to Jerusalem. However, a great storm raged and the sailors threw one of the heavy doors overboard. When they wanted to throw the second door overboard, Nikanor refused, saying they should throw him overboard with the door. Immediately, the sea became calm, but Nikanor was distressed over the first door. Miraculously, when the ship arrived, the first door floated up on the shore. Nikanor's supernatural self sacrifice infused this door with similar supernatural powers to return. So too Noah had to push himself beyond his natural endurance to continue building the Ark over 120 years of jeers from the people around him, continues Rabbi Shmuelewitz. Noah's mesirat nefesh infused the Ark with the supernatural ability to house so many animals and store so much food.

Now that the holidays are over, will we go to a Torah lecture when it's not convenient, say extra prayers or Tehillim for others, or take on an additional resolution to demonstrate our self-sacrifice for Hashem and His Torah?

Seforno tells us that Noah was saved not so much due to his own merit but simply because he found favor in Hashem's eyes. Thievery is a result of not caring for anyone else. While Noah did not become a thief, he did lack compassion as a result of his environment. The Ark served as a training ground for caring and compassion as Noah and his family were compelled to care for all of the animals, 24/7. In fact, the Midrash tells us that Avraham Avinu asked Shem in what merit the family left the Ark. He answered that it was in the merit of the chessed that they extended to the animals for that entire year. Hearing this, Avraham took upon himself to perfect the trait of chessed in himself and, in fact, chessed is the overriding characteristic we associate with him.

Rabbi Tauber quoting the Baal Shem Tov, reminds us that the alternate meaning of teivah is word. If we immerse ourselves in the words of Torah and of tefillah we will protect ourselves from the raging waters of our self-centered society. Just as Noah brought specimens of the outside world into the Ark, so must we bring the outside world into our lives to help us do our mission. Our mission is to leave our personal arks and go out to build a better world without greed, jealousy and hate, to create a world filled with kindness and the knowledge and love of Hashem.

Chassidic Sparks: Parshat Noach-Seeking Refuge

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The story of Noach and the tevah (ark) carries a universal message for all of us. When evil forces surround us and threaten to engulf us, we can flee to the safety of the tevah, an isolated, spiritual world.

The Netivot Shalom says that this tevah is the ark of Shabbat. On this special day, we abandon the rough and tumble of daily life for an oasis of calm waters. The Gemara says that if a Jew keeps Shabbat properly, he is

forgiven for the worst possible sins, even idol worship. The Torah commands us "I'davka bo, to cleave to Him." During the week it's a tough challenge to nurture a relationship of such closeness. But on Shabbat, Hashem comes down to be with us.

Shabbat is an opportunity to connect to Him directly. Talk on Shabbat should center on spiritual matters. One should feel as if the Divine Presence is a guest at the table. Words

of Torah and prayer should permeate our Shabbat meal, while business, sports, or politics should be banished from our minds.

The Shabbat binds us to Hashem. It is our ark that protects us from the insidious influences of the world of the six days of the week. May the sanctity we imbibe on this special day carry us through the week.

Holy and Pure Intentions

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilat Yesharim discusses how a person can elevate himself to a higher level in serving Hashem. What should be his kavanah (intent) in order to grow in chassidut – going beyond the letter of the law and coming closer to the Creator? All his actions should be for the sake of Hashem not just to mimic other people. There are people who perform mitzvot in order to receive reward in the world to come. The Mesilat Yesharim says that although one cannot criticize this type of intent, it is not ideal and not what Hashem really wants from us. One's true intent should be to be l'gadel kavod Hashem, to magnify and enhance the glory of the Creator.

What does it mean when we begin a blessing with the words, "Barach ata?" Can man bless Hashem? The Avudarham explains that we are saying, "You Hashem are the source of blessing." In addition we indicate that Hashem is melech hakavod. He rules over us, both in a general sense and in every minor detail. He

controls every little cell of our body. Our avodah is to magnify and sanctify the honor of Hashem. We should be grieved and distressed when other people detract from the awareness of His existence. The Mesilat Yesharim quotes Taana Devei Eliyahu. If one merits to learn and live Torah in the proper way one should feel pain that respect for Hashem is not widespread in the world. One should be saddened at the destruction of Zion and the Beit Hamikdash. The Zohar asks, who is a chasid? One who acts with piety with his Creator. This means constantly thinking of Him.

A Jew should yearn and pray for the redemption so that the world will come to recognize Hashem. Six of the nineteen blessings in shemonei esrei are connected to geulah. The Mesilat Yesharim further writes, if a man will ask, "Who am I to pray for the redemption?" It's for great people like the Chofetz Chaim who lived with the awareness that Mashiach

could come at any moment. But in truth Hashem wants our tefilot. It is the prayers of the simple Jews that will bring the geulah. If Mashiach will come or not is not up to us. Hashem wants to see our desire to do mitzvot and bring the redemption. That brings Him nachat ruach (spiritual pleasure).

Hashem wants us to seek out and talk about Tzion, to relive the experience. There are mitzvot we do in remembrance of the Beit Hamikdash. M'dorayta we are only commanded to take the four species on the first day of Sukkot. M'derabanan we take them on the other six days to remember the midkash. We eat matzot and maror l'zechar hamikdash. When we count sefirat haomer we say, yehi ratzon sheyibana beit hamikdash. If a Jew truly believes that Hashem wants to hear his prayers, he looks at himself and his purpose in this world differently. Doing mitzvot becomes not only about receiving reward but about sanctifying the name of Hashem.