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Parashat Noach 5771

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## On the Parashah... The Holy and the Mundane

[Tal Chermon]

Noach's sin of intoxication led to the exposure of the different elements in the human race. Each of Noach's three sons had a specific spiritual character. Shem was holy, Yefet was secular and mundane, and Cham was impure and unholy. Noach blessed the G-d of the holy Shem: "Blessed be Hashem, the G-d of Shem" (Bereshit 9:26). Shem is the great believer who cleaves to G-d, and in whose very soul the Divine Presence resides. It is he that is connected to the Divine, spiritual source of all existence. Only we, the Nation of Israel, spearhead this ideology of Shem in the world (even though the Arabs also are **called** "Semites," i.e. "from Shem"). Malki-Tzedek, the priest of G-d the Most High, was naturally the King of Yerushalayim, where he met Avraham Avinu and blessed him: "Blessed be Avram of G-d, the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth" (ibid. 14:18-20). He was none other than Shem, who is now very old. This blessing embodied Shem's spiritual heritage. G-d is lofty, spiritual and heavenly, "Most High," but He is also the "Maker of heaven and earth" and actively controls all the forces at work in the world. By bringing bread and wine to Avram, Malki-Tzedek transferred to him his role as High Priest, and his spiritual heritage. Finally after nine generations, he had found a person who could continue his mission in the world. "He (Malki-Tzedek) revealed to him the laws of the High Priesthood and he also revealed Torah to him" (Bereshit Rabbah 43 and see Nedarim 32b).

Yefet embodies all secular matters. Noach blessed Yefet with a play of words on his name: "Yaft Elokim Le-Yefet." Rashi quotes the Targum Onkolos which explains the word "Yaft" as meaning to enlarge or extend. The blessing thus means: May Hashem enable you to extend and broaden man's physical existence in the world (Bereshit 9:27 with Rashi). **His** task is to develop all the secular matters in the world such as mathematics, physics, meta-physics, music and the like. Even his involvement in metaphysics is only in the secular sphere of human knowledge as opposed to Shem who is preoccupied with the spiritual side of existence with faith in Hashem.

There is, however, no clash between Shem and Yefet since there is no contradiction between holy matters and secular matters. When there is a firm basis of inner faith, then there is room for external expansion and for the development of human culture and science. Noach's blessing was: "May Hashem enable Yefet to expand our existence but may he dwell in the tents of Shem."

On one occasion, our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, traveled on a boat together with Saul Tschernichowski (Hebrew poet and writer born in Russia in the Jewish year 5633 - about 130 years ago). Tschernichowski held a poetry evening on which he read some of his literary creations. The following morning, he asked Rav Tzvi Yehudah if he was interested in hearing his poems. Our Rabbi agreed. Tschernichowski, poised theatrically, began reciting his poems with great pathos. On completion, he said to our Rabbi: "You surprised me. As I was reciting I peeked at you and saw that you were actually listening." Rav Tzvi Yehudah replied: "And why not?" To this the poet said: "What do you, people concerned with religion and holy matters, have to do with secular poetry?" Our Rabbi answered: "There is no incompatibility between holy matter and mundane, secular things. The conflict is between holiness and unholiness. Here there is an uncompromising battle." Our Rabbi concluded: "Thus, perhaps it's feasible that you remedy your family situation" (Tschernichowski was married to a gentile woman, which is a cardinal sin in Judaism. It is in the sphere of "unholiness"). Tschernichowski thought for a moment and then answered: "Perhaps." Perhaps at that moment he had thought of repentance.

In contrast to Yefet, Cham is problematic. He is easily excited to promiscuous actions. He is the epitome of unholiness and impurity in mankind. We do not meet him half way. It is impossible for holiness to be connected in any way with unholiness. "Hashem wages a war against Amalek in all generations" (Shemot 17:16).

## Rav Aviner on...

### True Humility

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Ki Tavo 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: I do not understand our Sages' words: "Know where you came from – from a malodorous drop, where you are going – to a place of dust, worms and moths, and before whom you are destined to give a strict account – before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He" (Avot 3:1). Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto enlisted this source as an example of reflection that leads to humility (Mesilat Yesharim 23).

People have the feeling that if they feel inferior and have a low self-concept, they won't amount to anything. If a person thinks he has worth, that constitutes an incentive to achievement, but if he is nothing but dirt and dust, he will sit in shame. How hard the psychologists, in the wake of Adler, worked to liberate man from his inferiority complex. It's fine to be humble, but to view oneself as a "malodorous drop, worms and moths" seems like taking lowliness to an extreme.

Answer: First of all, our great master, the Rambam, indeed taught us that although in general one should not go to extremes but should stay in the middle, with humility we make an exemption: "The good path is not for one to be just humble, but rather to have a lowly spirit, even to extremes" (Hilchot De'ot 2:3). The proof comes from Moshe, himself: "The man Moshe was more humble than any person on earth" (Bemidbar 12:3).

Second of all, the Rambam proved in his "Guide to the Perplexed" that there is no need to be elite and prominent to serve G-d. We are not the ministering angels, but just simple people,

and all the same, we serve G-d. Not only does the army's chief-of-staff serve the homeland, but the simple soldier does too. There is no need for me to be special and to act in a conspicuous manner. After all, all that is insignificant compared to the great privilege of serving G-d and being His partner in the great enterprise of perfecting the world.

Every simple Jew has an enormous worth before G-d. The proof is the end of the Mishnah: "Before whom you are destined to give a strict account – before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He." That is G-d's will – that we do our work faithfully. Our Sages said: "Some accomplish more and some accomplish less, but the main thing is that one should direct his heart to his Father in Heaven" (Berachot 17a). One should say: I don't make light of myself. This is how G-d made me. I am insignificant compared to G-d and compared to others, but I am content with my lot and I do the best I can." Quite the contrary, it is this humility which affords one strength. Consider that all of our greatest spiritual figures were humble. Avraham said: "I have already said too much before my G-d! I am mere dust and ashes!" (Bereshit 18:27). Moshe and Aharon said: "What are we that you should complain against us?" (Shemot 16:7). And King David said: "After whom has the King of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog. A flea." (Shmuel 1 24:14), and "I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Tehilim 22:7).

In other religions as well, they spoke much in praise of humility, but that may be classed as "all talk and no action". We have not seen that their rulers are exemplary humble people. Even Plato's vision of a philosopher king, adorned in humility and all the other fine traits remains in the realm of a pious wish. Quite the contrary, Joan of Arc was a simple seventeen-year-old girl, not a member of the nobility, not learned and not even able to read or write, and besides all else, she was a woman and not a man. She was humble, simple, and innocent, and as a child, she loved to pray, which made her the object of scorn by young people her age. Yet thanks to her innocence, bravery and enthusiasm, she rose up and saved France from English conquest. All the same, the French could not bear that. They sold her to the English, and the Church burnt her at the stake. Only later on did they admit their error, but by then it was too late.

We say: "The humble shall inherit the earth" (Tehilim 37:11). The greater a person, the more humble he is. Every Torah scholar uses the expression, "In my humble opinion," and signs his writings, "Humbly." Our master Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook would sign, "A servant of the holy Nation on the holy soil." Even the King of Israel was commanded "not to let his heart become higher than that of his brothers" (Devarim 17:20).

We mustn't confuse humility with self-hate or self-derision. Humility does not mean dissatisfaction with one's good deeds. Quite the contrary, if I am insignificant and I have succeeded in doing a good deed, then that is very great indeed, and how happy I should be! By contrast, the arrogant person will disparage his own achievements, thinking them unsuitable to his self perceived abilities and exalted spiritual level.

How fortunate we are to have been privileged to be a Nation of the humble.

### *Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #12*

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

We say: "A person should always be in fear and awe of Hashem both in private and in public." Sometimes there are people who are "Yirei Hashem" (Those who fear Hashem) in private but are afraid of how they will look in public. This means their Yirat Hashem isn't strong enough. Then there are people who look like Yirei Hashem in public, but in private don't really have Yirat Hashem. This means they are fakers who really aren't in awe or afraid of Hashem at all. They are only afraid of people. We want to have Yirat Hashem at all times and in every situation.

## **Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law**

### One or Two Days of Yom Tov

Question: My daughter is in a seminary for the current year in Yerushalayim. She is definitely coming back to the US after the summer and has a scholarship to attend university. Should she observe one or two days of Yom Tov?

Answer: She should keep one day based on the opinion of Rav Goren (who based his opinion on Shaarei Teshuvah 496:3 and Kaf Ha-Chaim 496:40) that even though she has a plan to return, if she were to meet her match here, she would stay. This is also the opinion of Ha-Rav Shmuel Salant, Ha-Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank and Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef (not like the opinion of Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein in Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:101).

### *Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for*

*the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships*

#### The Beginning of Education

*The beginning of education is: "A child nurses from his mother's breasts" (Berachot 3a) – proper character traits do not flow through the milk, but health flows through it, and a close connection and love flow through it. The beginning of education is the mother's love. It gives the child self-confidence, strength, joy, spiritual health and stability, and will remain as a blessing for him his entire life.*

*A father's love is obviously also part, although he cannot nurse the baby. But he can hug and kiss the baby indefinitely, until a certain age where it then becomes confusing. This declaration of love will remain with the baby his entire life.*

*The most important thing at the beginning of a child's life is to feel love, and this need continues throughout his entire life.*

## Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

### Giving Birth on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible on Shabbat to drop children off at their grandparent's house on the way to driving one's wife to the hospital to give birth, or must they be left at the neighbors?

A: Any additional driving is forbidden.

### Tefillin Boxes

Q: What should one do with Tefillin boxes which are unusable?

A: Place them in the Geniza (Mishnah Berurah 42:2).

### Bad Dreams

Q: Since I have strengthened myself in purity, I am having unclean dreams. What should I do?

A: Our Sages explain that an evil person is shown a good dream and a righteous person is shown a bad dream. Berachot 55b. Since an evil person follows his evil inclination, the good inclination therefore appears in a dream when he does not have a choice. And it is the exact opposite for a righteous person. (Ain Aya of Maran Ha-Rav Kook ibid.) Nonetheless, recite the Bedtime Shema with Kavana and do not eat a lot at night.

#### Crumbs and Grooms

Q: I am told that if I place crumbs from Melava Malka under my pillow, I will see my Beshert in a dream?

A: Nonsense

#### Shai Agnon

Q: Is it permissible to read Shai Agnon's books?

A: Some are appropriate and some are not.

#### Humility

Q: Is it permissible for me to tell my parents something I succeeded in or is it arrogant?

A: It is honoring father and mother.

#### Matching up a couple whose fathers have identical names

Q: Is it permissible for a groom and bride to marry when their fathers have the same name?

A: There is no concern in our state for what is written in the Testament of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid (#23 and brought in Pitchei Teshuvah, Even Ha-Ezer 2:107 and Yoreh Deah 116:6). And for one who is concerned, add a name to the groom's name (Shut Noda Bi-Yehudah, Second Edition, Even Ha-Ezer #79. Shut Ezrat Cohain #5-7. See Shut Divrei Chaim, Even Ha-Ezer #8 and Orchot Rabbenu vol. 4 pp. 246-247. And we can mention that when they were writing the Tana'im for Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski, who is solely referred to as "Chaim," the question arose as to how to write his name since he was given other names at birth: "Shmaryahu **Yosef** Chaim." The Chazon Ish said: Who said that we should reveal his other names; they didn't have to do so! As is known, Ha-Rav Kanevski is the son-in-law of Ha-Rav **Yosef** Shalom Elyashiv, and Ha-Rav Kanievski's mother, the wife of the Steipler, was concerned that the other side would be particular about them having the same name, and she therefore brought up the issue at the Tana'im. The Chazon Ish, however, was not concerned since the son-in-law and father-in-law each had additional names – Ma'aseh Ish vol. 7 pp. 130-131).

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