



Parashat Noach 5772 - #207

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Ha-Rav with the Sefardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Ha-Rav Shlomo Amar

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Tevet: Commentary on Maran Ha-Rav Kook's Ikvei Ha-Tzon

Shevat: Commentary on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch vol. 1

Adar: Commentary of Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah on Mesilat Yesharim

Sivan: Commentary on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch vol. 1

On the Parashah... Crises and Covenant

[Tal Chermon]

Noach

Noach was an easygoing and even-tempered person. A person who becomes angry loses his senses and his soul is replaced with an idolatrous evil spirit. A person who is at peace, however, is blessed, for Hashem dwells in the heart of the tranquil (Sefer Charedim in the name of Midrash Neelam). "Noach [therefore] found favor in G-d's eyes" (Bereshit 6:8). Hashem's pleasure in man brought about a new stage in humanity's development: from **individuals, nations** now began to develop.

Advances Through Crises

The topic of this Parashah is the splitting of mankind into different nations and tongues. This is a very significant stage in human development. A **nation** is a new reality in the world. A certain philosopher once broke down the whole of creation into five categories: inanimate objects, vegetation, animals, human beings and **nations**. This advancement appears to have been unplanned, having resulted from the sin of the "Generation of the Dispersion" (due to the the Tower of Bavel debacle – Bereshit 11:1-9). However, matters which from our human perspective occur by default, are from Hashem's perspective ideal and intentional. We have been taught that progress is achieved through the failures that precede it, as our Sages have even said about the study of Torah: "A man does not achieve a complete understanding of the words of Torah unless he has first made errors in interpreting them" (Gittin 43a). There are many phenomena that only evolve and are only comprehensible because of the blunders and frustrations that preceded them. So it is in this Parashah. The result of the sin of the "Generation of the Dispersion" was that mankind was divided up into **nations**. The result of Noach's drunkenness was the characterization of these nations' spiritual nature; and the result of the sin of the "Generation of the Deluge" was the Divine covenant that the entire world population would never be destroyed again.

Hashem's Covenant with Man

The Divine covenant is not like a human contract. It is not a conditional agreement made between two parties, based on mutual interests, and for their common good. G-d's covenant is comparable to a law of nature. It is neither cancelled nor changed according to circumstances. It is a Divine creation that is even more lasting and permanent than the laws of nature. After the downfall of the "Generation of the Deluge," Hashem made a promise that never again would all mankind perish. This promise also included man's spiritual survival. Man would never lose the Divine image that he possesses. Some people despair of mankind. On seeing man's vulgar materialism, his sins and misdeeds, they think that the whole of the human species will degenerate back into barbarism. They are mistaken. The Divine covenant is an unbreakable promise that mankind, despite all of its faults and failings, will remain **human** and will eventually reach its lofty objective. We are fully aware of man's defects and flaws and definitely do not claim that he has already reached perfection. Only the intoxicated see the world as utopia. Our Sages interpreted the verse (Mishlei 23:31), "When he puts his eye to the cup (= concentrates on drinking) he walks on a plain," to mean that the whole world appears to the drunkard as if it is completely flat (Yoma 74b. The philosopher Leibnitz, in a book titled "Theodicee", Leibnitz creates a scenario in which there is no evil in the world.

The philosopher Voltaire, on the other hand, wrote a story in which evil clearly exists, but the main character fails to see it. The story highlights the absurdity of such an approach. The theory that there is no evil in the world is in truth very profound, but becomes ludicrous if taken too simplistically. Our Prophets and great Rabbis used a similar literary ruse in their controversy against opposing views: by simplifying the opinions of their opponents to absurdity, they were able to expose the underlying falsehood in these views). While it is true that there are shortcomings and failures in the world, in the final analysis, these very setbacks are what lead to man's elevation. "The flood came and blotted out almost all of existence, however, the root of humanity that remained was spiritually strengthened. The world became firmly based and a covenant promising its perpetual existence was sealed" (Maran Ha-Rav Kook in Orot Ha-Kodesh part 3, p. 66).

Rav Aviner on... Maran Ha-Rav Kook and Vegetarianism

Q: Must one be a vegetarian according to Maran Ha-Rav Kook?

A: Maran Ha-Rav Kook wrote in "Kovetz Tzimchonut Ve-Ha-Shalom" – "Vegetarianism and Peace" – that vegetarianism is a future vision. Its importance is real, but not for today. Why not? Because it is impossible to skip stages (in human development). Some vegetarians explain that they do not eat meat because it is showing compassion to animals. That is certainly important, but we first need to show compassion towards human beings, and we have not yet fulfilled all of our obligations towards human beings. After we finish being merciful and righteous to human beings, we will move on to animals. We cannot skip stages. We are not criticizing those who are vegetarians. If a person wants to be a vegetarian, he may do so, but it is impossible to define it as a mitzvah or even as a stringency. Someone once asked me: I am a vegetarian and I have decided to stop. Do I need a "hatarat nedarim" (annulment of vows), since someone who performs a proper custom a few times and wants to stop must perform a "hatarat nedarim"? I said that there is no need for a "hatarat nedarim," since vegetarianism is not a mitzvah or stringency. It is a good, compassionate, and proper character trait for one who wishes, but it is before its time. An individual who desires to be a vegetarian is fine, but this cannot be – as Maran Ha-Rav Kook refers to it – a communal practice. Maran Ha-Rav Kook also warns in the same article that vegetarianism can actually become a sort of hijacking of one's feelings of compassion. This means that sometimes there are those who are cruel to other people, but because their Divine souls cannot bear this cruelty, and need to be pacified, they say: we will be vegetarians and be compassionate to animals. In fact, there were Nazis in the concentration camps who were vegetarians, and some even say that Hitler himself was a vegetarian!

Maran Ha-Rav Kook ate meat, as did our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah. In the letters of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, he wrote a letter to our Rabbi, when he was young and not eating meat, and asked: Why aren't you eating meat? You need to eat meat. It is not our level to refrain from doing so. You know that there are many cruel people in the world and many vegetarians who are cruel. Maran Ha-Rav further wrote: A Torah scholar, along with other things, needs to know how to slaughter animals. There are certainly Torah scholars who do not know how to slaughter, but it is good and proper to know. Please learn to slaughter (Igrot Re'eiya vol.

3, letter 780). Then another letter (ibid. letter 784): Did you learn to slaughter? Another letter (ibid. letter 799): So, are you learning to slaughter? And finally a letter (ibid. 839): I am happy that you learned to slaughter. Now that you learned, you need to do so. So, did you slaughter yet (see letters 852, 853 and 860)? Maran Ha-Rav Kook consistently exerted pressure on our Rabbi so that he would not possess an ideology that it was forbidden to slaughter or eat animals.

Not eating meat is a future vision. How do we reach this future? Slowly, in stages, through all sorts of Halachot which teach us that we need to respect animals, not be cruel to animals, not to cause undue pain to animals, etc...But, in the meantime, we must concentrate even more on our treatment of human beings.

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