



Parashat Noach - #253

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On the Haftarah... Unconditional Love

[Ashkenazim and Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 54:1-55:5
Sefardim: Yeshayahu 54:1-10]

Can the covenant between the Master of the Universe and the Nation of Israel be cancelled on account of our sins?

This is one of the central claims of Christian theology: the Jews ceased being the Chosen Nation. The Nation of Israel remains only in body but not in spirit. We were replaced by "Verus Israel – the true Nation of Israel," which, according to their opinion, is Christianity.

This is certainly not the teaching of Yeshayahu in our Haftarah: "For the mountains may move and the hills falter, but my kindness will not move from you and My covenant of peace will not falter, says Hashem, who has mercy on You" (Yeshayahu 54:10).

There is no "Old Covenant" and there is no "New Covenant," just one eternal love of the Eternal G-d for His Nation, which is also eternal. This is the "love which is not dependent on anything" which is mentioned in Pirkei Avot (5:20); it is not conditional and it therefore cannot be nullified. This is the love which we mention in "Shacharit" (the morning prayers) before the Shema, i.e. "Ahavah Rabbah" according to Ashkenazic tradition or "Ahavat Olam" according to Sefardic tradition.

The prophet Yirmiyahu is even more explicit: "Thus says Hashem, who gives the sun for a light during the day and the laws of the moon and stars for a light during the night, who sets the sea in motion and its wave to roar, the G-d of Hosts is His Name.

If these laws move from before Me, says Hashem, then the offspring of Israel will also cease from being a Nation before Me forever. Thus says Hashem, if heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below searched, then I will cast off all of the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, says Hashem" (Yirmiyahu 31:34:36). Just as the laws of nature are immutable, so too is the law of the great history of the Chosen Nation of Israel. Yirmiyahu emphasizes that "for all that they have done" (36), that is to say, despite all of our sins. Even if the entire natural world crumbles, the Nation of Israel – the soul of the world – will not be consumed.

In light of this incredible Divine love, how can we understand the Exile, and its horrible suffering, which we experienced for such a long period? The prophet Yeshayahu encouraged us to see this painful page of our history in the proper perspective: "For a brief moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you" (54:7). Is two thousand years of Exile only a "brief moment"?! For the Master of the Universe, and in relation to eternity, yes it is! Israel pleasantly confirms this in the Psalms: "For a thousand years in Your eyes is like yesterday when it passed and like a watch in the night" (Tehillim 90:4). In fact, we passed through the worst night, but now the light of morning is shining on the horizon: "For you will break forth to the right and the left, and your offspring will possess nations and settle desolate cities" (Yeshayahu 54:3).

Are all of these events not materializing right before our very eyes? Instead of giving our attention to the bad news, which is spread daily by the media to depress us, we should once again read the optimistic, positive and realistic promises of the prophet Yeshayahu.

The truth of the matter is that the prophet already knew that it would be difficult for us to free ourselves from the trauma of the Exile, and the constant concern and fear of our wanderings. So he teaches us about trust in Hashem. "Do not fear, for you will not be shamed; and do not be humiliated, for you will not be mortified; but you will forget the shame of your youth, and you will not remember the mortification of your widowhood anymore" (4).

Do not lose trust in Hashem, nor in ourselves, because of the difficult "moment" in Exile. This period of lowliness and destruction is finished once and for all – "In the overflowing of wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness, I will have mercy on you" (8).

The era of love has returned: "Break out into song and be joyous" (1), "Enlarge the place of your tent and stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not" (2), "Stay away from oppression for you do not need to fear" (14).

The era of love has arrived.

Rav Aviner in the News...

Rav Aviner On Smartphones & Kosher Phones

<http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/General+News/141492/Rav-Aviner-On-Smartphones-%26-Kosher-Phones.html>

Prominent Dati Leumi Posek Rabbi Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a was asked 1. for a p'sak regarding Smartphones and 2. if one is required to use a Kosher phone. The Rav's words were aired on Yeshivat Machon Meir's internet Shiurim broadcasts.

The Rav explained that SMS text messages and internet connectivity are helpful to many people. He feels there is no prohibition in using either of these services.

"It is certainly preferable to have a Kosher phone but this is a Chumra and not an obligation. One who feels that a non-kosher phone is a Michshol (stumbling-block) must prohibit himself from using such a device" the Rav stated.

Rabbi Aviner continued by explaining there are things that the Torah does not prohibit, but if a person realizes that such a thing will cause him to stumble, he must place restrictions upon himself to avoid falling due to this Michshol.

Rav Aviner on...

Are Levi's Kosher?

[Q&A from Rav Aviner's weekly radio show]

Q: Is it permissible to wear jeans or a jean skirt? I heard that some rabbis ruled that it is forbidden because jeans are not modest.

A: Quite simply, the material itself is not a problem. This material is durable, not easily ruined and, as is well-known, quite affordable. This material also does not stick to the body. A material which sticks to the body and outlines its contours is not modest for men and, all the more so, for women. My understanding is that the rabbis who say that it is forbidden to wear jeans do not do so because of immodesty, but because they represent a distorted culture. When you wear jeans, you identify with this culture. The whole problem of wearing clothing which represents the surrounding non-Jewish culture is called "chukat ha-goyim – following the non-Jewish practices." It is forbidden for us to wear the same clothing as non-Jews. This prohibition only applies, however, if the non-Jews are the only ones who wear a particular type of clothing. If observant Jews also wear them, there is no problem of "chukat ha-goyim." This discussion is similar to one regarding the black suit worn today by many yeshiva students. Originally, in Russia, yeshiva students did not wear suits, but rather all sorts of long coats. What happened? Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once visited Paris and he saw that university students were wearing suits. He said, "Those who are learning in yeshiva need to dress like those students. They are students of Torah and holiness." In Lithuania, the

students therefore wore suits. When those students arrived in Jerusalem, the Sages of Jerusalem excommunicated them. They wrote harsh broadsides that wearing this type of clothing is a violation of "chukat ha-goyim." One needs a long coat. There is a principle, however, that if people breach this prohibition and dress like non-Jews, they are in violation, but once this practice has spread, it is no longer forbidden since this dress is no longer worn solely by non-Jews. This is stated in the responsa of the Rashba (vol. 5 #121). It is possible that in the past someone who wore jeans was identifying with the distorted culture, but today all sorts of people wear clothing made with jean material, both men and women, including righteous, G-d-fearing individuals. It is therefore permissible to wear such clothing. Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein also has a responsum on this issue in "Igrot Moshe" (Yoreh De'ah 1:81). He was asked if there is a requirement to wear the clothing which Jews wore in Poland, since in America both Jews and non-Jews dress alike. Ha-Rav Moshe answered that it is permissible to wear the clothing that the non-Jews wear since there is no unique type of Jewish clothing, and even G-d-fearing Jews wear the same clothing as the non-Jews. Similarly, there is a story told about a couple who moved from Hungary to America, and the wife wanted to cover her hair with a wig like others in America instead of shaving her hair and wearing a scarf as had been the custom of her foremothers in Hungary. The husband, however, did not agree and he went to Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein to ask about this issue. Ha-Rav Feinstein saw that the husband did not have a beard. He asked: Did your father and grandfather have beards? He said: Of course, everyone had a beard. He asked: why are you clean-shaven? He said: This is America! Ha-Rav Feinstein said: If so, there is no problem for your wife to wear a wig. Everything is dependent on the issue of modesty. If the jeans and the jean skirts are modest, they are acceptable. If they are not modest, including having images and decoration which draw the attention of others, they are not acceptable. In short: It is not a question of the material, but the piece of clothing, as is the case with all other items of apparel.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Laws of Mourning

Tattoos and burial

Q: Is it forbidden to bury a Jew with a tattoo in a Jewish cemetery?

A: It is forbidden to get a tattoo (Vayikra 19:28), but after someone has already violated this mitzvah, he is not disqualified from being buried in a Jewish cemetery. There is also no obligation to remove the tattoo after death and there may even be a problem of "nivul ha-met – desecrating the dead" if one cuts a corpse. There are Jews who have tattoos and later they repent. The tattoo does not prevent one from repenting. There is a teshuvah in Shut Minchat Yitzchak (3:11) in which Ha-Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss deals with this issue. A man had served in the army and during his time in the military got a tattoo on his left arm. The tattoo was -- of all things -- of a naked woman. Now the man had become religious and wanted to start putting on Tefillin. He asked: is it permissible to put Tefillin over the tattoo of

the naked woman? The Minchat Yitzchak wrote that the man has no choice but to put his Tefillin on his left arm, even though it bears the tattoo (see Menachot 73a), and the tattoo is not be a "chatzitzah – obstacle" between the Tefillin and the skin. The problem, however, is that a man cannot daven or recite a blessing before a naked woman, even if it is a picture, since it could lead to impure thoughts. To counter this problem, the Minchat Yitzchak recommends three things: 1. Expose only as much of his arm as is necessary to wrap the Tefillin, thus the entire image will not be visible. 2. Wear the smallest size Tefillin that is halachically permitted to minimize the contact between the Tefillin and the tattoo. 3. When saying the blessing, keep the entire arm covered, so as not to recite the blessing in front of the image. If he does these three things, he may put on his Tefillin. It is permissible to remove the tattoo and he may want to try to do so with laser surgery (also see Shut Lehorot Natan 8:72 and Shut Revivot Ephraim 8:306 regarding removing tattoos).

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