

A Taste of Torah

The Baby and the Bathwater

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

Hurricanes. Blizzards. Tornadoes. Severe weather tends to wreak havoc wherever it occurs, upon humanity and the environment. But nothing that has happened for the last several millennia can hold a candle to the events taking place in this week's parsha. The Mabul (Flood) of the days of Noach remains unmatched, and, as per G-d's promise to Noach, it shall remain unmatched for all time. And while people like to blame the strange weather of the last several years on global warming, the Torah makes it clear what caused the destruction of the world: sin.

There is an inherent difficulty here. I can understand that all of Mankind deserves to be washed away, but what would prompt G-d to wipe the entire face of the Earth off the face of the Earth, as well? What did the rest of Creation do wrong? A closer look at the verses yields the answer; the Torah states, "For all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth." (6:12) Even the animals had gone astray; their destruction was thus deserved, as well.

There are several difficulties that still need to be grappled with, however: Firstly, while humans have free choice, animals are driven by instinct. How, then, are we to understand deviant, unnatural behavior among animals? Secondly, since they have no free choice, why are they punished for their "misbehavior"? Thirdly, the verse indicates only that animal life had become corrupted; what about plant life and inanimate objects? Why were they destroyed?

To appreciate the answer to this conundrum, we first have to appreciate

why G-d created a world in the first place. The Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), in his work Derech Hashem (The Way of G-d), states that the world was created so that Man can earn a portion in the World to Come by coming close to G-d. And everything created in the world, he explains, is a means towards that goal. So, while you may have thought that Bessie was created to wander around the meadow munching grass, the real truth is that she's here to provide a tasty, nutritious meal for you and me so that we can be fit to serve Hashem. Those beautiful mountains aren't a mere geological formation that Hashem chose to plopp down somewhere; they are an opportunity for mankind to be awed by the greatness of G-d.

Since everything in creation is here for humanity, it is affected, positively or negatively, by the spiritual state of Man. If Man is righteous, then creation attains a more positive spiritual state. If the opposite occurs, though, and humanity wallows in the mud, then the world is dragged through it, too. And just as the world was created to help Man in his journey towards spiritual greatness, when humankind is sent packing, all of Creation is sent along.

The Generation of the Flood sinned so egregiously, fell to such depths, became so immoral, that the world itself became spiritually polluted, to the extent that the natural instincts of the animal kingdom deviated from the norm. But the behavior of the animals was symptomatic of the disease that now pervaded the entire earth. It was no longer sufficient for Man to be wiped out; the entire world would go down with him.

Stories For The Soul

Respect Pays

An older lady in a faded gingham dress and her elder husband, dressed in a threadbare suit, walked into the office of the president of Harvard University.

"We want to see the President," the man said softly.

"He'll be busy all day," the secretary snapped.

"We'll wait," the lady replied.

For hours the secretary ignored the poorly dressed couple, hoping they'd get the hint and go away. Finally, she grew frustrated and interrupted the president. He sighed in exasperation but agreed to see them.

The lady began, "We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. But about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. We would like give a building to Harvard in his memory."

"A building! Do you have any idea how much a building costs?" asked the president. "We have over \$7.5 million in properties at Harvard."

The lady turned to her husband, "Is that all it costs to start a university? Why don't we just start our own?"

Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford walked away, traveling to Palo Alto, CA, where they established the university that bears their name, a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about.

The people in Noach's generation were destroyed because they stole and were corrupt. Hashem wants us all to live in peace. Simply being respectful and nice to people - despite their appearance - makes all the difference.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

The Kollel is on Sukkos break. Classes resume October 30.

KNOW THY ENEMY TUES. AT AISH

Join Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers in studying the tactics and strategies of the Yetzer Hora, and develop your own battle plan for the greatest challenge of your life - the war against the Evil Inclination. Based on the classic work Chovos Halvevos. Tuesday mornings 7:55-8:25 at Aish. For information, please contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



THE LATE SHOW: THURS. NIGHT SEDER AT AISH

Join the Chevra for learning and cholent at Aish. Maariv is at 9:00 p.m. followed by learning and refreshments. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Nov. 1, Nov. 8, Nov. 15, Nov. 22, Nov. 29, & Dec. 6 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Bal Tolin

Even if one is technically exempt from bal tolin due to lack of funds, it is advisable that the employer, if it is practical, borrow money to pay on time and thus fulfill the positive

commandment of bal tolin.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Separate Realities

Michael Hamm from Brooklyn, NY wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I heard something in the name of the Alter of Slabodka, but I have my misgivings as to whether he said such a thing, as it does not comport with what I understood to be Torah's outlook.

It began with three questions: How was it that the Egyptians had thick darkness at the same time and place that the Jews had light? Similarly, how could the same glass of liquid be blood for an Egyptian and water for a Jew, as the Midrash relates? Lastly, what is the explanation of the idea that each person should say, "bishvili nivra haolam ~ the world was created for me." If it was created for me, then how can someone else claim it was created for him?

The answer given was that there is more than one reality: Hashem creates a separate world for each person, and what is true in my world is not necessarily true in the next fellow's. Most often, people's worlds coincide; thus, for example, both my world and my colleague's include the fact that he and I conversed this morning. However, sometimes worlds do not coincide, realities differ; thus, the same glass of liquid was blood for some and water for others.

The implications of this bother me. In the example I gave, my colleague's world and my own coincide in the fact that we conversed this morning. But how do I know that that is really so? Perhaps in my world we conversed, but

in his we did not. Or, perhaps outside my world he does not exist!

Dear Michael Hamm,

Not presently having access to the Alter's works I cannot verify that he said that. However, it sounds like a valid approach to understanding the Torah.

Outside of the physical world, there is also the immediate spiritual world that surrounds each individual. I heard a wonderful story that amplifies that idea. Once the Ba'al Shem Tov wanted to enter a shul to pray. However hard he tried, he could not enter the shul. When his students asked him what the problem was he answered that the shul was full of unanswered prayers and that he couldn't push his way in!

Was the shul full of unanswered prayers? Not for anyone else. But for the Ba'al Shem Tov it was a reality that was as impenetrable as a solid wall. There are "things" happening in every place at every moment. Our not sensing them does not mean that they are not there or that someone else cannot.

Still, it's clear from midrashic texts that both the Jews and the Egyptians were aware of each others' relationship to the blood or water. That is, the Egyptians saw that the Jews were drinking water and the Jews saw that the Egyptians were drinking blood. Furthermore, each understood why their realities were different at that moment.

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