

## Rosh Yeshiva Torah

## Reclaiming Our Mandate | A Shiur by Rav Michael Rosensweig

Compiled by Aryeh Kaminetsky, Y.C. '19

Hashem gives Noach a series of *brachos* after the *mabul*: “God blessed Noach and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it” (Bereishis 9:1-4).

These *passukim* closely parallel the first *bracha* given to Adam HaRishon: “...‘Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.’ God said, ‘See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food” (Bereishis 1:28-29).

Both statements open with a *bracha* regarding *peru u’revu*, are followed by a description of the relationship between man and animal, and conclude with what man’s diet should consist of.

Radak concludes that this event in *parshas Noach* represents a new *briah* which was preceded by the *tohu va’vohu* of the *mei mabul*. Therefore, these *brachos* are serving the same function as Adam HaRishon’s *brachos*: inaugurating life in a post-*briah* world.

The obvious similarities between these two passages highlights their two noticeable differences. The first of these is an emphasis on Adam’s unquestionable role as the pinnacle of the hierarchy of creation versus the subdued “*morah*” Noach exhibits over the animals. It seems that man has been downgraded from someone who is intended to dominate nature to someone intended to merely outlast and survive it.

The other difference is the permission for Noach to eat the meat of animals. Some Rishonim, like Radak, downplay the significance of this transition by claiming that the *heter achilas basar* was the original destiny of man from the beginning of creation. Others, like Ramban, explain that this *heter* reflected a fundamental change in man’s nature.

The mainstream view in Chazal and *meforshim* is to look upon these changes as a dilution of the standards to which Hashem holds man accountable, as reflected in the words of Hashem as He accepts Noach’s post-*mabul korban*, “...since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth” (Bereishis 8:21). The weakness of man as seen in the corruption of the pre-*mabul* world had led to a demotion of the status of man in the world.

This outlook explains why Noach specifically is associated with this change. Noach is the prototypical survivor: someone who will never be swayed by his neighbors but will never elevate them either. He embodies man’s new role of merely maintaining the status quo. This sentiment manifests itself in the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*, which consists of the bare minimum needed to keep society functioning.

While the *mabul* and Noach may have reflected a step backward for humanity, Avraham and eventually Klal Yisroel came forward to recapture the lost destiny of Adam HaRishon. To this day, we represent the hope of fulfilling Adam HaRishon’s original ambitious mandate as the ultimate culmination of *maseh Bereishis*.

(This article is an abridged form of a longer analysis.)



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## A Nice Vort

### A Lesson in Humility

Written by Micah Hyman, Y.C. '20

After Noach departs from the stage of history, the Torah enumerates the successive generations responsible for reconstituting civilization. Right before the Dor Haflaga, the Torah (Berershis 10:25-29) mentions a man named Yaktan whose family was so large several *passukim* are devoted to listing off his descendants. Moreover, the Torah particularly draws attention to his large family by superfluously recapitulating after the list that “all these were the children of Yaktan.” Rashi suggests a reason that Yaktan enjoyed such bountiful offspring. Riffing off of the name Yaktan, which shares a root with the word *katan* (small), Rashi comments that because “Yaktan was humble, and made himself small, he merited to establish all these families” (Bereishis 10:25).

Rashi does not intend to intimate that humility causes a wealth of offspring; rather, Hashem rewarded Yaktan’s humility with the unrelated recompense of many children. However, in life there really is a causal relationship between humility and the ability to produce “offspring”, i.e. results. In a quote widely attributed to many, but which Harry Truman was known to quote fondly, we learn that “it is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.” Someone hunting for credit is far more concerned with maintaining his or her own imprint on a product than considering the best course. Only when egos are shelved can decisions be made based on what’s best for a product, rather than for the individuals behind it.

Yaktan also teaches us *how* to be humble. His Hebrew name is the word “*katan*” conjugated with the active, future tense “*yud*.” Humility is not a passive state of simply *being* small. Rather, it is something that one actively works to cultivate through a variety of mechanisms, whether it be considering one’s dependence on Hashem or by focusing on appreciating other people’s strengths.

Finally, Yaktan’s example teaches us about the ironic result of humility. The fact that Yaktan avoided the limelight resulted in the Torah recording for all of posterity who Yaktan was, and, with the elucidation of Rashi, what moral values he represented. Someone who doesn’t take credit will nonetheless find that deserved acclaim will come on its own. This is captured by the famous comment in the Gemara that “Anyone who seeks greatness, greatness flees from him, and anyone who flees from greatness, greatness seeks him” (Eirubin 13b).

## Major Machloksim in the Parsha

Written by Jakey Borck, RIETS

**Hashem commanded Noach to build a *teva* with these dimensions: three hundred *amos* long, by fifty *amos* wide, by thirty *amos* tall. How was this able to hold all of the animals as well as supplies for the duration of the flood?**

- **Ibn Ezra:** The *amos* referred to in the Torah are measured by the size of Noach, who was much larger than the average human being nowadays. Thus, the *teva* was in fact big enough to hold all of the animals and supplies during the flood.

- **Ramban:** The only way that all the animals and food could have fit was through a *neis nigleh*. Ibn Ezra is wrong for two reasons. Firstly, *amos* are a consistent measurement throughout the Torah, not sometimes larger and sometimes smaller. Secondly, if Noach was larger than the average human and those were the *amos*, then the animals were also larger and you would just develop the same problem. Thus, the whole idea of the animals fitting was a *neis nigleh*. Ramban then questions himself: if it was going to be a miracle anyways why did the *teva* need to be big at all? Just leave it as small as you want and Hashem will make the rest work. Ramban suggests two possible answers. One, so that people would notice it being built and ask questions and have the possibility of leading to *tshuva*. Second, that Hashem wanted Noach to put a good amount of *hishtadlus* into the *teva* in order to warrant a *neis nigleh*. Hashem was trying to emphasize that you don’t get miracles without putting in some effort.

**After the story of the *mabul*, the Torah speaks about the Dor Haflaga, which led to the dispersion of the human race across the globe. What is the purpose of this episode in the Torah?**

- **Rambam:** People might ask: if we all descend from Adam and Chava, and then from Noach after everyone was subsequently knocked out in the *mabul*, then where does all the cultural diversity come from? The Torah is coming to show us that the Dor Haflaga is the origin of cultural diversity.

- **Sforno:** The story of the Dor Haflaga comes right before Avraham Avinu. Up until the point of the Dor Haflaga, there was complete religious conformity amongst humanity and Avraham would not have been able to stand up against the tide. After Hashem scattered all the people, there was an emergence of different religious perspectives and Avraham was able to come out with his differing approach of monotheism.

# Foursquare

The Zohar HaKadosh (Vayikra 15) quotes that the *mabul* is called *mei Noach* because Noach should have asked Hashem to have mercy on the entire world, but he didn't. Rav Shimshon Pincus wants to know where this idea comes from. Who says that Noach should have prayed for them? He answers that in the *passukim* (Bereishis 8:20-21), it says that Noach's *korban* is accepted along with a promise to never bring another *mabul*. Since we see that Noach had the *koach* to save them from any future *mabul*, he also could have saved them from the first one had he just prayed. Since he didn't daven, he is held responsible for it. You see from here that one cannot possibly fathom the potential impact of *tefilla*.

*Eitan Rolnick, Syms '19*

In *parshas Noach*, Rashi comments that "Their fate was sealed only on account of their sin of robbery (*gezel*)."  
What is so unique about *gezel*? At its core, *gezel* is a sin that is the antithesis of *bein adam l'chaveiro*. *Gezel*, as opposed to *gneiva* (stealthily stealing), is blatantly superimposing one's selfish will to have something without having any regard for another person. The *passuk* says in Tehillim "the world shall be built on *chessed*," which is the epitome of *bein adam l'chaveiro*. When God chose to destroy the world it was not a punishment, per se, but rather a logical consequence. By undoing the very foundation of the world, society was no longer fit to exist.

*Shmuel Rosenthal, Syms '20*

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After the Torah records Shem ben Noach's lineage, we hear about Noach's descendants' settlement in the land of Shinar and the eventual building of the infamous tower. In reading the plain sense of the *passukim* one wonders, should Hashem not have celebrated humanity's long-awaited solidarity? Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman suggests that Hashem was worried because the people were celebrating themselves as one powerful group, as opposed to viewing themselves as a cohesive unit able to serve Hashem. The tower being their first move foreshadowed worse creations coming from this newly linked group. Hashem, therefore, intervened to dismantle their flawed union before it could take its inevitably destructive path.

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At the end of the *parsha*, the Torah describes the tower the Dor Haflaga wished to build: "... a tower with its top in the Heavens" (Bereishis 11:14). On the surface, it seems like they just wanted to come "close" to Hashem. What did they really do wrong? When Yaakov Avinu saw the ladder in his dream the *passuk* describes the scene similarly: "...and its top reached to the Heavens" (Bereishis 28:12). Rabbi Aryeh Cohen pointed out that by Yaakov Avinu it says "**to** the Heavens," but by the Dor Haflaga it says "**in** the Heavens." The *passuk* in Vayetzei tells us that our goal can be to get **to** the Heavens, but not to go above ourselves and try to enter within.

*Matthew Mark, Y.C. '20*

## Bottom Line Halacha

### Washing Before Davening

*Written by Yaakov Kaminetsky, Y.C. '21*

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 92:4) writes that one must wash his hands before *tefilla*. One must even walk a *parsa* (the equivalent of 1.2 hours of walking) to find water if there is no water available. However, if this travel will be inconvenient for him, he must only walk up to a *mil* (2000 *amos*) to find water for washing. If washing his hands will cause him to miss *zman tefilla*, (the Mishna Brurah (ibid.) adds even *tefilla b'tzibur*), then he may wipe his hands on any surface that will clean them. Additionally, one must only travel these distances if he knows his hands are dirty or if he touched a normally covered part of his body. However, *stam yadayim*, hands which were washed and appear clean but the individual had a *hesech ha'daas* (a break in focus), must be washed with water only if there is water readily available. If there is no water readily available, they can be washed on any surface that will clean them (MB OC 92:15, 92:26). If one washes his hands before *shacharis* and ensures they remain clean until *mincha*, he does not need to wash them again before *mincha*. However, if one had a *hesech ha'daas* (which Rema notes includes learning Torah), he must wash his hands again before *mincha*, even if he thinks that they are still clean (OC 92:5).

## Sugya from the Parsha

### Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach: A Shabbos Lesson

Written by Azriel Fine, Y.C. '19

In *parshas Noach*, we are introduced to the world of the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 56a/b) introduces a *machlokes* in a Tosefta about which seven *mitzvos* the *bnei Noach* are commanded in. At first glance, these *mitzvos* seem intuitive, including such commandments as do not murder and do not steal; these appear necessary for a functioning society. However, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 58b) posits an additional *din* in the name of Reish Lakish that a non-Jew who “rests” on our Shabbos is *chayav misa*. This statement of Reish Lakish is qualified by Ravina, who extends the *issur shvisa* to taking a day of rest on any day of the week (which happens to include Shabbos). Rashi and Yad Rama explain that the *issur* for non-Jews to “rest” on our Shabbos derives from the *issur* of *gezel*, while the *issur* to celebrate a different religion’s holiday derives from the *issur* of *avoda zara*, both of which are already *mitzvos bnei Noach*, warranting this extension by Ravina of the new *din* of Reish Lakish.

What is the *svara* underpinning the *issur shvisa* for non-Jews? There are two main *svaros* that emerge. The first reason, found in Rashi, proposes that *menucha* is *assur* because of *bitul melacha*, and the only reason we are allowed to rest on Shabbos and ignore our mandate to work is due to Hashem’s explicit command. The second reason, given by Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 10:9), is that the *issur* is for a non-Jew to be “*mechadesh da’as*,” to create commandments or religious imperatives for themselves (in contrast to our *mitzvah* from Hashem). One potential *nafka mina* is a non-Jew “resting” without religious intent, which for Rashi would fall under *bitul melacha*, while it might not fall under *mechadesh da’as* for Rambam.

In light of these perspectives, I think the continuation of the aforementioned Gemara beautifully contrasts our *mitzvos* and the *mitzvos bnei Noach*. The Gemara asks why this *issur shvisa* is not ultimately counted as one of the *mitzvos bnei Noach*. The Gemara answers that only *mitzvos* that are violated through activity are counted as part of the seven, and the violation of not working which triggers this *issur* is passive. The idea that *shvisa* is passive and therefore gets excluded from the *sheva mitzvos* lends itself to a fascinating idea. *Bitul zman* is viewed as an *issur* both for Jews and non-Jews (even if it is not included in the *sheva mitzvos*). Thus, non-Jews have the *issur shvisa*, as *shvisa* equals *bitul*. But for Jews, this *issur* clearly does not apply to our *shvisa* on Shabbos. Why might this be? The answer has to do with the idea that Hashem endowed Shabbos with a certain level of *kedusha*.

Ramban in Yisro comments that “rest” on Shabbos is generated by the *kedushas hayom*. He goes further to refute the idea that this *shvisa* is one of laziness or *hevel*, and states that the opposite is the case! Shabbos is a day that we are specifically supposed to be focused on actively serving Hashem through the opportunity given to us by *shvisa*. The idea that emerges from this *sugya* is that the *issur bitul melacha* and Shabbos do not conflict. Hashem not only allows for our *shev v’al tasei* “rest” to not be considered *bitul zman*, but even a religiously uplifting and inspiring *kum v’asei* day of action.

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