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Parsha

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Parsha Perspectives

RABBI LABEL LAM

ויעש נח ככל אשר צוהו ה' ונח בן שש מאות שנה והמבול
היה מים על הארץ ויבא נח ובניו ואשתו ונשי בניו אתו אל
התבה מפני מי המבול

"And Noach did all that Hashem had commanded him, and Noach was six hundred years old and the flood waters were upon the earth. And Noach came and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him into the Ark because of the waters of the flood." (Bereishis 7:5-7)

"Because of the waters of the flood": Even Noach was among those of lesser belief. He both believed and didn't believe that the flood would come, and therefore he didn't enter the Ark until the waters forced him. (Rashi)

One is hard-pressed to understand how Noach could be considered of lesser belief. If he didn't really believe that the flood waters would come, why would he have worked on building the Ark for 120 years and subjected himself to intense ridicule? Indeed the Torah states clearly that "Noach did *all* that Hashem had commanded him." Wouldn't that indicate that his belief was flawless?

Consider another situation in the Torah in which a great individual shares similar criticism. When Sarah heard that she would be having a child at her old age, she "laughed within herself." *Rashi* (17:17) explains that Sarah was rebuked because her laughter betrayed her disbelief. Could it be that our holy matriarch Sarah didn't believe?

Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen, better known as the *Chofetz Chaim*, maintains that this disbelief *was* in fact present. It is possible, he explains, for one to have complete belief without internalizing that belief. The *Chofetz Chaim*, in fact, says that the Torah devotes so much space to the discussion around Sarah's diminished belief as a message to a future generation when our prayers for the arrival of Moshiach will eventually be answered. People who daily recited or even sang the *Ani Maamin* in "Thirteen Articles of Faith," expressing their "complete belief" in the arrival of Moshiach – even if he may tarry, may greet the news of Moshiach's arrival with disbelief. "Hey, I just finished redoing my kitchen! He can't be here now!"

How can one both believe and not

believe simultaneously? It's simple! A person is not one-dimensional. Some pass the written exam of life but miserably fail the driving test. There is no way of knowing whether a fireman who trained for many years will run into the burning building to save a life or run the other way.

The saintly Rabbi Chaim of Sanz asked some of his chasidim what they would do if they found a wallet with a significant amount of money in it, and there were identifiable signs of who the owner was. In all sincerity, one of the chasidim said, "Of course, I would return it!" The Rebbe exclaimed, "Foolishness!" Another sheepishly admitted that he would keep it. "*Ganav* - Thief!" the Rebbe proclaimed. A third man said, "I really don't know what I would do, Rebbe, but I hope I would have the moral resolve to do the right thing and return it to the rightful owner!" "Ahhhhh!" sighed the Rebbe of Sanz, "*This is a wise man!*"

We can't know with certainty how we will react when faced with challenges, but we must realize that knowledge alone does not guarantee results. Noach indeed did everything he was commanded to do by G-d, but the Torah implies that there was a gap between his belief and the internalization of that belief. We as too may have a shortfall in the internalization of our beliefs and would do well to at least be honest about this possibility and strive – through study and prayer – to prepare ourselves for it. After all, the best time to buy an umbrella is before it rains.

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Parsha POINTERS

Talking Points

BEREISHIS

RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

1. YOU'RE FIRED!

"And He blotted out all existence that was on the face of the ground, from man to animals to creeping things and to the bird of the heavens..." 7:22

And He blotted out - "Rav Chisda said, 'They sinned with heat [i.e. promiscuity], and were judged accordingly with boiling water [i.e. the waters of the Flood were scalding]. - Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 108b

There are a significant number of manifestations of the number 15 related to the Great Flood:

"Fifteen cubits upward the waters swelled, and the mountains were covered." [7:20]

"And the waters strengthened on the earth one hundred and fifty days." [7:24] This is a total of 10x15.

"This is how you shall construct it: three hundred cubits the length of the Ark, fifty cubits its width, and thirty cubits its height...make it with a lower, second, and third deck." [6:15-16] At ten cubits height per floor, each floor was a total of 150,000 square cubits.

Kli Yakar (Rabbi Ephraim Lunshitz) explains the manifestations of the number 15 in the following manner. The primary sin that caused the Great Flood was licentiousness and immorality. The Talmud [Tractate Sotah 17a] explains that the Hebrew words for man and woman share the letters *Aleph* and *Shin*. Woman, however, has an additional letter *Hey*, whereas Man possesses the letter *Yud*. Together, these two letters spell the Divine Name, "*Ya-h*," which has a numerical value of fifteen. When man and woman reside together in a G-dly fashion, they merit the Divine presence as symbolized by the Name *Ya-h*. When they behave immorally, His Presence departs and all that remains are the letters *Aleph* and *Shin* which spell "*Aish*" - fire. The terrible fate of the generation of the Great Flood was brought about by none other than the victims themselves, who, through their excessively immoral behavior, drove away the Divine Presence and were consumed by the resultant fire.

2. WINTER BLUES

"Continuously, all the days of the earth, planting and

harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, they shall not cease." 8:22

They shall not cease - The celestial bodies remained static and the heavenly mazalos [constellations] were suspended throughout the flood. - Bereishis Rabbah 33

They shall not cease - Immorality manifests due to an abundance of materialism and the resultant boredom. Busy societies do not possess the luxury to engage in this sort of behavior. Thus, the Almighty promised that no longer would we enjoy the ease of life which they enjoyed since the birth of Noah and which led to this disastrous state of affairs. From this day onward, "they shall not cease," - i.e. their workload will be overwhelming and allow little time for immoral predilections. - HeEmek Davar (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin)

They shall not cease - They shall not cease their abnormal operation which I instituted following the Great Flood. Prior to that time, the sun constantly orbited at the equator and the earth was not subject to the upheaval and change that comes with the various seasons. The earth was in a constant state of Spring-time. Now it veered off course, resulting in enormous difficulty for the universe. Crops would not grow as before, produce would be less nutritious, human life-spans were severely diminished, and so much more. - Stormo, Malbim

"Rabbi Yitzchak says, [prior to the Great Flood]... they enjoyed beautiful weather like between Pesach and Atzeret [i.e. Shavuot]. - Midrash, Bereishis 34:11

Sforno concludes on a hopeful note. The verse limits this sorry state of affairs only to, "all the days of the earth." It will only be this way until the Almighty renews the earth in the End of Days with the advent of the Messiah and the World to Come. At that time, we will live longer, produce healthier and more plentiful crop, and overcome the limitations of the seasons.

3. WHEN NATIONS CONVENE

"The whole earth had one language, with identical words." 11:1

One language - This language was the Holy Tongue [Hebrew]. - Rashi

With identical words - They came with one

plan and said, "G-d has no right to select the heavens for Himself. Let us ascend to the sky and wage war against Him." - Rashi

One language...identical words - This incident occurred in the lifetime of Peleg who was born 101 years after the Great Flood. Noah and his children certainly spoke one primary language and were of like mind. They lived quiet, secure, family lives and didn't seek many extras. - Malbim

"Gathering and alliances of the wicked are detrimental for them and for the world at large. Dispersal and disunity of the wicked is good for them and good for the world." - Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 71b

When the wicked convene, even for an ostensibly moral purpose, little good can ever emerge from such a convention. Instead, they'll utilize their allegedly moral forum to inflict all sorts of damage upon moral nations and reward immoral nations. It would be better that these bodies be disbanded, than to pretend that their existence is justified by their pretensions of honorable intent.

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PartnerTALK

THE CHRONOLOGY OF A BRIS

RABBI LEIBY BURNHAM

Dear Rabbi,

My wife is due in two months with our first son, and we are really excited about the upcoming birth. My wife and I both have study partners, and after each of us discussing the upcoming baby with our respective partners, decided that we want a traditional Brit Milah. I've only been to a few of them, and usually find myself getting lost in the ceremony. Can you please enlighten me (I should say, us) so we can better understand what's happening?

Thanks,
Stanley G.

mitzvah (the onus of the *mitzvah* is specifically on the father), and sometimes he hands the knife over to the *mohel* to show this.

The *mohel* preps the baby, recites the blessing on performing the *mitzvah* and performs the circumcision. Immediately after the circumcision, the father makes a blessing regarding his obligation to enter his son into the covenant of Abraham.

The *mohel* then bandages up the baby, and then another person is honored with holding the baby while additional blessings are recited and the baby is named. Both honors can be designated to one person or to two different people. A blessing is recited over the wine, and another one regarding this great *mitzvah*. Then there is a paragraph in which we declare the baby's name and pray that he grow up to be a great Jew.

The *kvatter* then brings the baby out, and a festive meal closes out this *mitzvah*.

I hope that this information was helpful. I wish you all the best.

You and your wife should get only *nachas* (pride) from your son!

Rabbi Leiby Burnham

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Hi Stanley,

B'sha'a Tova, as we like to say – the baby should be born in the right time, and both he and Mommy should be in excellent health.

The *bris* (*Brit Milah*) is possibly the most spiritually significant experience your son will ever undergo. It is the only *mitzvah* that alters one's physical body and leaves him forever marked with the sign of the holy covenant. Therefore, it is a great honor and merit for anyone who plays a role in facilitating this *mitzvah*.

Here is the chronological rundown:

The first honor is given to a couple (*Aruch Hashulchan*), often one that is hoping to also be blessed with a child. This honor, called *kvatter*, is given to the people who bring the baby to the area where the *bris* will be performed. The woman usually takes the baby from the mother and then hands him off to her husband, who brings the baby to where the *mohel* has set up. These people are the representatives of the father, who is commanded to circumcise his son – hence the name *kvatter*, which is from the Yiddish word, *k'fotter*, like the father.

As the baby approaches, the *mohel* calls out "*Baruch Haba*," which translates literally as "blessed is he who has come." Rabbi David Avudraham (Spain, 1260-1350) points out that the numerical equivalence of "*Haba*" is eight, so essentially the *mohel* is saying, "Blesses is he who will be circumcised on the eight day!"

Elijah the Prophet plays a prominent role in a *bris*, because he once complained to G-d that the Jews were not adhering to their covenant with enough care. G-d decreed that he should come to every *bris* to bear testimony to the fact that the covenant is eternal. We prepare a special Chair of Elijah in honor of this visit (next to the chair in which the *bris* will take place). The next step of the *bris* is when someone else is honored with taking the baby from the *kvatter* and putting him momentarily on the Chair of Elijah.

The father of the child then takes the baby from the Chair of Elijah and hands him over to the *sandek* – the highest honor at the *bris* ceremony – the person who will hold the baby during the circumcision. In many places, the father verbally appoints the *mohel* to be his representative in doing this

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TABLE TALK

FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

RABBI LABEL LAM

"And it was that the whole world was of one language and one common purpose. And it came to pass when they traveled from the east they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said one to another, [...] 'Come, let us build us a city, and tower with it head in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed across the whole earth.' [...] G-d said, 'Behold, they are one people with one language [...] should it not be withheld from them all they propose to do?! [...] let us [...] confuse their language, that they should not understand one another's language.' And G-d dispersed them [...] over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city." (Bereishis 11:1-8)

א) The building of the Tower of Bavel seems to be an unparalleled act of rebellion against G-d. Oddly, it is not described in the Torah as such or even as a sin. How could this glaring omission be explained?

ב) Unlike previous and subsequent stories recounted in the Torah, no names are mentioned in association with the Tower of Bavel ("they traveled from the east and they found a valley," "they said to one another"). Why would the names of the people involved be omitted?

ג) An apparent motivation in building the Tower was a fear of being dispersed. What were they afraid of, and how does this tie in with their scheme to build the Tower?

ד) The people were punished by losing their common language. How was this a fitting punishment for their scheme?

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Soul Talk

We learn from the Torah that it was only due to the quality of **יָרָא**, favor, that Noah was saved. *Sefer Chareidim* writes that anyone who is careful never to get angry is bestowed with favor. Rabbi Avraham Pam, in his *Atarah LaMelech*, elaborates on this theme. A person who is prone to anger, he says, is one who constantly feels that he is in a situation in which things are just not going his way: people should be showing him more respect, or his personal burdens are unfair and too much for him. A person who is humble avoids all of these emotions. He does not feel that he deserves to be especially recognized, or that his merits warrant that situations should always develop in line with his wishes. He accepts any load that life hands him with forbearance. Humility is thus the trait that protects a person from the pitfalls of anger. This is confirmed by the verse in Proverbs (3:34) that states: **וְלִצְנוּנִים יִתְּנוּ חֵן**, *The humble are bestowed with favor*. The very same favor that is the lot of the humble is bestowed upon one who never gets angry.

If humility is necessary to enable one to bear large burdens without complaint, then Noah must have truly shone in this area. For a period of twelve long months he was shut away in the Ark, with the care of all the earth's creatures in his hands. The myriad details of feeding and attending to such a large host of animals placed an extraordinary burden upon Noah and his family. In fact, our Sages note that Noah suffered physically from the burden. Truly, Noah was deserving of the special favor endowed to the humble.

Rabbi Pam relates that his mother would often tell her children stories of *tzaddikim* (righteous people) as a way of imbuing them with an

appreciation for noble character. A favorite story involved the Rebbe, R' Mordche'le, who had always harbored a great love for Eretz Yisrael. Once, he acquired a piece of cloth from Eretz Yisrael and wished to have it made into a pair of *tzitzis* for himself. He entrusted this job to one of his chassidim, an expert tailor, and waited with anticipation for the finished product. Days and weeks passed, and the tailor did not show up with the *tzitzis*. Finally, the Rebbe sent for the tailor, who appeared before him overcome with mortification.

"What happened?" asked R' Mordche'le gently, "Why did you not return all this time? Where is the holy cloth?" Haltingly, the tailor responded, "Holy Rebbe! In all my years as a tailor I have never before made such a mistake! As I cut out the hole in the garment for the neck, I did not realize that the cloth was folded over. Only when I lifted the cloth did I realize that I had made not one hole for the neck, but two!"

For a moment the Rebbe's face registered bitter disappointment. Immediately, however, he returned to his usual calm demeanor. "Two holes for the neck, you say? But this is exactly what this garment called for! You see, one hole was necessary as it is in every *tzitzis* garment, and the other hole was needed so as to test Mordche'le to see if he would fall into anger!"

Rabbi Pam concludes that one who wishes to improve his character and free himself from anger can find helpful advice in many of the *mussar* works. But the first step is to come to a firm realization that anger is destructive and dishonorable, and that no effort should be spared in avoiding this dangerous trait.

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