



Parsha Perspectives RABBI LABEL LAM

ויעש נח ככל אשר צוהו... ויבא נח ובניו ואשתו
ונשי בניו... אל התבה מפני מי המבול

"And Noah did all that G-d commanded him... And Noah 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." (Genesis 7:5-7)

Noah was "among those of lesser belief" because 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 Noah 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, subjecting himself to intense ridicule? Indeed, the Torah states clearly that "Noah did all that G-d commanded him." Wouldn't that indicate that his belief was flawless?

Consider a similar situation in the Torah: When Sarah heard that she would be having a child in her old age, she "laughed within herself." Rashi (Genesis 17:17) explains that her laughter betrayed her disbelief. Could it be that our holy matriarch Sarah didn't truly believe?

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen, known as the Chafetz Chaim, says that this disbelief was in fact present. It is possible for one to have complete belief without internalizing that belief. The Torah devotes so much space to the discussion around Sarah's diminished belief as a message to future generations when our prayers for the arrival of the Messiah will eventually be answered. Even those who daily recite (or sing) *Ani Maamin* in "Thirteen Articles of Faith," expressing their "complete belief" in the arrival of the Messiah, may greet the

news of his arrival with disbelief. "Hey, I just finished redoing my kitchen! He can't be here now!"

A person is not one-dimensional. Some pass the written exam of life but fail the driving test. There is no way of knowing whether a fireman who trained for many years will run into a burning building or run the other way.

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz asked some of his *chassidim* what they would do if they found a wallet with a significant amount of money in it, with identifiable signs as to the owner. One of the chasidim avowed, "I would return it!" The rabbi exclaimed, "Foolishness!" Another sheepishly admitted that he would keep it. "Thief!" the rabbi proclaimed. A third man said, "I really don't know what I would do, but I hope I'd have the moral resolve to return it to the rightful

owner." "Ahhhhh!" sighed the rabbi, "This is a wise man!"

Knowledge alone doesn't guarantee results. Although Noah did everything G-d commanded him, there was nevertheless a gap between his belief and the internalization of that belief. Yet this gap did not prevent him from acting.

We can't know how we'll react when faced with challenges. But, like Noah, we can still take concrete, positive steps that put us in the best possible position for when those challenges do arise. After all, the best time to buy an umbrella is before it rains.

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WORD of the WEEK צוהר

"You shall make a צוהר — *tzohar* for the ark" (Genesis 6:16). Rashi cites two opinions regarding the meaning of *tzohar*. One view maintains that it means a window, the other a luminous rock. Both meanings are based on the connection of *tzohar* to צהרים — *tzoharayim*, which means noon, or daytime, a time of maximum light (Ibn Ezra, ad loc). The word for olive oil, יצהר — *yitzhar* (Deuteronomy 28:51) is based on the fact that olive oil is used for illumination (Rabbi Hirsch) and that it is a light color and almost transparent. (Rabbi David Kimchi). Targum Onkelos simply translates *tzohar* as *nehor*, light.

Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

At a time when the entire world was unified, with one language and one purpose, the people settled in the valley and decided to build a huge tower to reach up to the heavens — the Tower of Babel. G-d broke up this rebellion by confusing their language and dispersing them all over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:1-8).

נ) The building of the Tower of Babel seems like an unparalleled act of rebellion against G-d. Oddly, it is not described in the Torah as such or even as a sin. How can 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 Babel. The verses state: "They traveled from the east and they found a valley, and they dwelled there"; "They said to one another." Why would the names of the people involved be omitted?

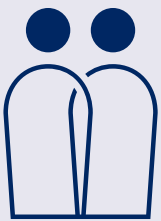
ג) The people were punished by losing their common language. How was this a fitting punishment for their scheme?

A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

When one mentions the name of a deceased righteous person is one obligated to praise him or her? At the beginning of the *parshah*, the Torah mentions Noah, and before listing his descendants, the Torah notes that he was righteous. Rashi comments that "since he was mentioned, the Torah spoke of his praise, as the verse states (Proverbs 10:7) 'The memory of the righteous is blessed.'" The Talmud (*Yoma* 38b) derives this obligation from the fact that G-d praised Abraham when mentioning him regarding the destruction of Sodom. The common custom is to append the phrase, "the memory of the righteous is blessed" (usually with the Hebrew acronym, *atzal*) after mentioning the name of a deceased righteous person. When a person mentions the name of a deceased parent, the mitzvah to honor parents obligates the child to praise him or her just as he would praise a righteous person (Rabbi Betzalel Stern, *Responsa Betzel Hachochmah* 5:21).

HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT!

Noah walked with G-d" (Genesis 6:9), Abraham "walked before" G-d (ibid 17:1, 48:15), and the Jewish people are enjoined to "walk behind G-d" (Deuteronomy 13:5). The differences between these descriptions of walking with, before, and behind G-d are explained by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Noah walked in step with G-d, careful not to deviate from G-d's path lest he fall into the depravity of his generation. Abraham was a pioneer, who walked ahead of G-d and, based on his understanding of G-d's will, created a path for others to follow. We have been given the Torah, containing all that we need to know of G-d's will, and hence we are commanded to follow the Torah, and walk behind G-d (*Midbar Shur* 13).



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