



שמע קולנו

NOACH, MOSHE, AND LIVING WITH THE TIMES

Yaakov Lauer ('18)

In this week's *parsha*, Parshas Noach, the *passuk* explains G-d's decision to destroy the humanity with the words

כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ:

"...for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth (Bereishis 6:12)." Rashi quotes the Midrash that explains that even the animals were affected by the immorality of Noach's generation.

The Beis Halevi wonders: how this is possible? Animals don't have free will; they act solely on instinct. Only humans can choose between good and bad. How could animals possibly choose to be immoral? He explains that the Midrash is teaching us an important concept: when someone sins, it poisons the surrounding atmosphere. Thus, the immorality of the humans had a negative effect on the entire world, including the animals.

This idea is also seen in Maseches Chagigah 15a, where we are taught that a *tzaddik* gets reward for both his portion and that of his friend, while a *rasha* is given punishment for both him and his friend. This is because in both cases, the actions of the person had a lasting change on the environment and by extension acted as a cause for his friend's actions, in one case to sanctify it and in another case, G-d forbid, to degrade it.

This may be why, in describing Noach, the *passuk* remarks

נח איש צדיק תמים הנה בדורתי

"Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations." As Rashi famously explains, quoting the Midrash, this can be understood as a praise of Noach. Despite being in such a morally bankrupt environment, he was able to follow Hashem's ways. Similarly, when the Arizal was asked how our *avodah* today can compare to that of the *tzaddikim* in earlier times, he responded that nowadays, there's more resistance from our impure surroundings. Therefore, even though objectively our *avodah* pales in comparison to the

earlier generations, it is valued just as much because of the struggle it requires. We see that serving Hashem requires one to fight against the spiritual pollution of our time.

There seems to be a contradiction within the Rambam regarding the unique status of Moshe Rabbeinu. On the one hand, in Chapter 7 of Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah as well as in the seventh Ani Ma'amin, the Rambam describes how Moshe was unique among prophets; no other human ever reached the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. On the other hand, in Hilchos Teshuva 5:1-2, the Rambam criticizes the deterministic view that people are destined to be *tzaddikim* or *resha'im*; rather, "Every single person is fit to be a *tzaddik* like Moshe or a *rasha* like Yaravam." Don't the two Rambams contradict each other?

Rav Moshe Feinstein famously answers in a vein similar to the statement of the Arizal, above. He says that granted, Moshe was unique—he reached a spiritual level never attained before and never possible to attain again. However, there is another aspect to being "a *tzaddik* like Moshe". Moshe reached his ultimate potential. For him, that happened to also be the ultimate human potential. But anyone can be like Moshe, in the sense that anyone can take his/her unique sets of strengths and weaknesses and use them as much as possible in the service of Hashem.

We may have heard this idea before and subconsciously dismissed it. "Sure, it's nice *chizuk*—but *lema'aseh*, practically speaking, I do not have the potential of Moshe Rabbeinu, or even the Tanna'im, Amora'im, or Rishonim! Isn't that depressing?" No, it isn't. When we think about it, the answer of Rav Moshe Feinstein is really quite deep. What is our purpose in this world? Pirkei Avos 4:16 tells us that this world is compared to the antechamber before the main event, the World to Come. The sum total of our existence on Planet Earth is to serve as a test. If I'm taking a class in Algebra, and on the day of the final the teacher accidentally passes out a test on the subject of zoology, am I upset that I won't do well on the test? Of course not! That test isn't for me!

Similarly, there is no reason to be upset about a perceived lack of potential, for two reasons. Firstly, we often minimize or are unaware of our potential, due to our Yetzer Hara and lack of desire to work hard. Secondly, even if we truly do have a lower potential than the next person, that none of our business. Hashem, in his ultimate wisdom,

decided who has what strengths and what weaknesses, and our mission in life is to work with those G-d-given traits to become the best people and *ovdei Hashem* we can be.

Let us take the lesson of Noach and Moshe Rabbeinu and be conscious of our unique place in history. If we feel, like Noach, that society around us is immoral and that it's harder than it used to be to serve Hashem, that isn't an excuse to slack off. On the contrary, Hashem knows exactly at what point in history he has placed us, and it is our sacred mission to fulfill our potential to the fullest extent.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER SPEECH

Yehuda Snow ('19)

In this week's *parsha*, Parshas Noach, concerning what animals Noach should bring onto the Teivah, the *passuk* states:

מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה וּמִן הָעוֹף
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר רָמַשׂ עַל הָאָדָמָה:

"[Noach took] of the pure animal, of the animal that is not pure, of the birds, and of each thing that creeps upon the ground (Bereishis 7:8)." The question is: why did the *passuk* say "*Umin habeheimah asher einenah tehorah*, from the animal which is not pure" when the *passuk* could have said the essentially identical "*Umin habeheimah hatemei'ah*, from the *tamei* animal," using less words? In general, the Torah does not have extra words for no purpose! The Minchas Shay answers this question by bringing down the Gemara in Pesachim 3a, which states in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that we learn from the Torah's use of extra words over here that one should never say anything disgusting, because the Torah could've written of "a *tamei* animal" instead of "an animal that is not *tahor*" but chose not to, in order to teach us the importance of proper speech.

The Gemara in Pesachim actually takes this idea of not saying anything disgusting one step further. The *mishnah* at the very beginning of Pesachim had stated that we do Bedikas Chametz "*ohr le'arba'ah asar*." The Gemara tries to figure out what this means and comes out it means the night of the fourteenth. The Gemara asks: if it means the night of the fourteenth why didn't the *tanna* of our *mishnah* use the word "*leilei*, the night of," a much clearer language? Rashi explains the Gemara's answer to mean that the *tanna* wanted to talk with the cleanest language possible, and even though the word *leilei* isn't a disgusting word, *ohr* is a nicer word. We see from here that we are not supposed to just avoid

speaking a disgusting way; we even have to look for ways to make are speech cleaner and purer.

However, Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in his Sefer Ta'am Vada'as, asks the obvious question: if the Torah considers the word "*tamei*" to be a type of disgusting language, why does the Torah use the word *tamei* in many other places? This use of *tamei* by the Torah elsewhere seemingly contradicts the rule we infer from the Torah about not using disgusting language over here!

Rav Moshe Shternbuch answers that there is a fundamental difference between the two scenarios. In this context the word *tamei* would have only been mentioned in passing, just to let Noach know that he should also bring non-Kosher animals onto the Teivah; therefore, the Torah thought that it was necessary to write more words in order to not write something disgusting. However, wherever the Torah actually uses the word *tamei*, the Torah is discussing forbidden foods or places where a *tamei* person may not go; therefore the Torah uses this less refined language to show how strict this prohibition is and to make people feel disgusted when they think about violating it. We see from here that the Torah does want to use the cleanest language possible in an ideal situation. However, the Torah believes that sometimes it is important not to speak in the purest language possible if talking in this way will prevent people from sinning.

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