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If You Need Help--Call!

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered October 19, 1974)

The high point of the story of Noah and the Flood comes when Noah and his family enter the ark. The Torah describes it in the following words: ויבא נח ובניו ואשתו ונשי בניו אתו אל התיבה מפני מי מבול *“And Noah and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons came into the Ark with him from before the waters of the flood”* (Gen. 7:7).

The Rabbis were somewhat taken aback by the last phrase. Did Noah enter the ark only because of the waters of the flood? Was he not a “righteous man” who should have been motivated to enter the ark by the divine command, rather than by the threat of the actual flood waters?

Rabbi Yohanan replies that the Torah means what it says quite literally. נח מחוסר אמונה היה... ואילמלא שהגיעו המים עד קרסוליו לא נכנס לתיבה. *“Noah was lacking in faith...Were it not for the fact that the flood waters reached his ankles, he would not have entered the ark!”* (Gen. R. 32:9)

Rashi gives us the same message, but uses a slightly different expression: *“Noah believed and he did not believe”*--in other words, Noah was a man of shaky faith, he wavered in his belief in God's prediction that the flood would come, and that is why he entered the ark only when forced to by the waters.

However, this interpretation is quite troublesome. It does not take into consideration the fact that Noah had believed in God all along, that he had already proved his faith under far more difficult circumstances when he built an ark--according to tradition, this lasted for 120 years--risking the ridicule of his peers. Is it reasonable to assume that a man who had invested all this time in establishing his principles and his faith, would fail at the last moment?

I therefore suggest that the object of the emunah (faith) in this context is not God but oneself. The problem is not a religious one, whether or to what extent Noah believed in God, but the psychological one: did he believe in himself? And I take Rashi's idiom quite literally: מאמין ואינו

מאמין, *“Noah believed and he did not believe.”* The Rabbis, according to this interpretation, fault Noah for two things: for believing in himself, and for not believing in himself!

Let me explain. All of us, by virtue of our morality and finitude, must rely upon each other. Especially in more advanced civilizations, we are not fully independent and autonomous. We all know that we need God, and God knows that we need each other. It is impossible to survive without interdependence. And yet, we so often fail to seek help on time and frequently wait until it is too late, until the flood waters reach not only our ankles, but our very noses! Why?

There are two reasons, each the opposite of the other. One of them is: too much self-confidence, an excess of security, egoism, arrogance. A man is a מאמין (believer) in his own powers and image, and he is afraid that asking for help will put him in a position of dependency, inferiority, and subservience.

The second reason is: an utter lack of faith in oneself. A man is an אינו מאמין (non-believer), who lacks a sense of security, who experiences lowliness and diffidence and unworthiness and sinks in despair.

Remarkably, both of these can and usually are present at once. It is the phenomenon of ambivalence, where two opposite tendencies conspire to paralyze us unnecessarily.

After 120 years of building the ark, Noah still had to be driven into the ark by the waters reaching his ankles, because of both reasons: he was a maamin who thought to himself, “I have been spared so long, I will be spared longer. If I really am such a righteous man, such a צדיק תמים, then nothing will happen to me now.” Noah was also an אינו מאמין, he lacked faith in himself. He probably thought to himself, “I am doomed with the rest of the world. There is nothing in me that makes me worthy of being saved, whereas the rest of the world drowns. I am helpless and hopeless.”

When one is so beset by these extremes of overconfidence and under-confidence, of both an excess and a want of faith in himself, it is a sign of serious spiritual defect. It shows that he is מחוסר אמונה, that he lacks faith--in the Almighty.

I mention this not only as a way of explaining a text, but more important, as a way of bringing to your attention a disturbing problem, namely that many people come for help when it is too late, or come not at all, because they are either too sensitive to their own egos or too considerate of those whom they consult; because they have too much confidence, they think they can handle every problem by themselves, and too little confidence that anyone in the world can help them.

I speak to you from a background of counselling experience. I am constantly worried by people who hesitate too long before calling out for help. Parents who have problems with children sometimes wait until the problem is unmanageable. Religious problems are sometimes allowed to fester beyond the possibility of successful solution. Domestic tensions should lead a couple to ask for help before an eruption is irrevocable. Yet too often, people believe that to ask for help is a blow at the ego, a sign of weakness--or, the opposite, that they are so far gone that no one can help.

The same holds true for medical assistance. This week, by startling coincidence, the wife of the Vice President-designate was operated on for the same disease as was the wife of the President. All this helped in calling attention to the importance of seeking medical help--on time! It is amazing how many people defer examinations because of these two opposite reasons: because of maamin, the feeling that "it can't happen to me," and eino maamin, the feeling that "it is too late, I am afraid to find out because if I have got it I am finished"--both dangerous, both false, both to be shunned in every way.

But even more than these, there is something else that comes up most frequently in my experience. In mentioning it to you, I should like to make it clear that I do not refer to anyone individually--but I refer to every one individually, I refer to situations where there are emotional or family problems, and where psychological or psychiatric help is clearly indicated.

Now, I do not believe that every psychologist is a modern version of a witch-doctor who can, by certain incantations and the payment of appropriate fees, cure everything and anything. I am not sufficiently affluent to

indulge in such fantasies. I do not think that psychological help is the right of the poor and the duty of the rich. But I never fail to be startled by intelligent and sophisticated people who shrink from consulting psychologists, when to do so is the only rational recourse. I am amazed at how often I have to speak to intellectual and sensitive and au-courant people, and explain to them as simple as teaching the A-B-C, that "if you taken a broken knee to the orthopedist, and an injured eye to the ophthalmologist, why not take your bruised emotions to a psychologist?"

The answer is that these people are מאמין ואינו מאמין, they suffer from both extremes. On the one hand, they cannot admit their supposed inferiority by asking someone else to help, and on the other hand, they inwardly feel that their problems are too enormous, that they are beyond salvation. But this is a perfect formula for perishing in the flood of personal anguish.

Of course, as with any other profession, one must seek out a person who is competent. Moreover, in the case of religious Jews, we must also make sure that the therapist in question is, if not personally observant, at least sympathetic; if not sympathetic, at least understanding. At the very least, he should be an ethical professional, who understands and abides by the canons of his own discipline, according to which the therapist must fully respect the values and principles of his patient and not seek to dissuade him from them.

But this having been done, I urge all of you: seek help on time! If you need help--call!

Recent events of the past week or two impel me to add one more point to what I have been saying. It is something which I mention not because there is anything any of us can do about it, but perhaps I can in some small way help to express the frustration and anger all of us feel.

It is easy enough to get individuals to seek help. That is a comparatively simple thing. The big problem is, not what does one person do when he needs help but does not ask for it, but what of a whole world which desperately needs help but does not realize it?

This past week the United Nations, by an overwhelming vote, invited--in a precedent-breaking act--the Palestine Liberation Organization to have the right to appear before it as observers. Arafat or one of his deputies will soon come to New York to address the UN. The world organization is extending its hospitality to the chief international gangster. And by the perverted power of radical rhetoric, this butcher is presented to us as a genuine revolutionary and guerilla!

The ghosts of the slain children of Maalot will testify that such a world is sick, very sick, and desperately needs help!

Sometimes I think back to those naive and romantic days when, in the euphoria of expectations following World War II, we hypnotized ourselves with those progressivistic incantations about the UN being the “family of man” and we spoke about it as the “concert of nations,” attributing to it some supernal moral authority. We overlooked the simple and obvious fact that a collection of nations with self-interest, some of it malicious, means that we have more malice than one nation individually, not less!

We used to tell ourselves: if only we had a UN in the days when Hitler came to power we might have escaped the terrible experience of World War II. That was what we thought. But now we know the truth. This week we have begun to realize: if there had been a UN then, they would have overwhelmingly invited Hitler to address them as their honored guest! And who knows but that a vote to condemn the “final solution” would have been defeated by a lopsided majority?

Where shall we find a psychiatrist wise enough to deal with the whole UN, that not only acts in brazen cynicism--and according to some theories of diplomacy, such amoral conduct may be necessary--but whose outrageous and shameless acts are greeted with applause and murmurs of constant in the corridors, without contrition or remorse?

Where, oh where, can we find a couch big enough for nine-tenths of mankind?

If I were the analyst or the chaplain of the UN, I would diagnose the illness as a critical case of ambivalence, of *maamin* and *eino maamin*!

The UN is *maamin*, it arrogantly expects to get away with it, it is willing to vent its hostility in a kind of diplomatic gangmugging, and then honor the bully.

Thinking in the Box

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z”l

In the beginning of this week’s parsha, Noach is described as an ‘*ish tzaddik, tamim hayah bedorosav*’ - a righteous man, complete in his generations. Rashi, in his commentary to the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah 6a*), explains the word ‘*tamim*’ - complete, as meaning ‘*anav ushefal ruach,*’ or, humble and of lowly spirit. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his commentary *Meshech Chochmah*, cites this comment of Rashi, and notes that later, when God speaks to Noach, He refers to him to

And it is *eino maamin*. The Western nations and the “developing nations” do not have enough confidence, not enough will, to organize and unite against the common threat. They do not understand that if they do not confront the Arabs now in the case of Israel, they will have to do so later under far worse circumstances.

If I were to make that diagnosis, I would add that both attitudes lead to a *מבול*, a deluge--but not a *מבול של נפט* (*flood of oil*) but *מבול של דם ודמע* (*a flood of blood and tears*).

So the Noah syndrome is upon us again. From Munich to Maalot and the invitation to PLO, is some 35 years--what a short memory the intellectual community has! What we are when we do not understand that God will not long let the world get away with it!

For ourselves, in addition to bearing in mind what I said urging each of you to seek help on time, I also would like to add two things we can do, one large and one small. The big thing is to stand by Israel and support it in every way in the days ahead. The small thing is that before that day of infamy comes at the UN, let them assemble, two weeks from this coming Monday, in peace and in dignity, but vigorously, to goad the UN into the awareness of the enormity of its infamy. Of course, no one will listen. But so what? We must do it as an act of conscience to ourselves, and as human beings, to protect and maintain the dignity of mankind despite what has occurred.

We recognize that the extremes of *maamin* and *eino maamin*, both of which lead to the flood, stem from the lack of faith in the Almighty. We must therefore respond with more faith--faith in God, faith in ourselves, faith in our holy Torah--and also faith that this faith will redeem an unworthy world.

ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום

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him only as a *tzaddik*, and not as a *tamim*. Although Rashi himself, in his Torah commentary, explains that this teaches us to say only part of a person’s praise in his presence, and all of his praise when not in his presence, Rav Meir Simcha offers an additional explanation. He says that Noach lived in two generations, the generation of the flood, and the generation that followed the flood. During the generation of the flood, his trait of righteousness prevailed, and enabled him to resist committing the various

sins that most people were then prone to. In the generation that followed the flood, Noach's trait of being humble was paramount, because, having rescued mankind through building the ark as a shelter from the storm, he could have, after the flood subsided and the world began to repopulate, presented himself as the man responsible for everyone else's existence, and become very haughty. However, Noach did not do so, and, thus, was considered a tamim, a complete person

Rabbi Yisroel Alter of Gur, in his commentary Beis Yisroel, without citing either Rashi or Rav Meir Simcha, also speaks of Noach's trait of humility, deriving it from a different verse. As the waters of the flood begin to fall, the Torah tells us that all existence was wiped out, and that there remained 'only Noach and those with him in the ark' (Bereishis 7:23). The word for 'only' - *ach* - is always understood as denoting a limitation. Rashi says that part of Noach was actually missing, because a lion took a swipe at him in the ark when he delayed his feeding schedule. The Beis Yisroel, however, says that the word implies a limit in Noach's sense of pride. The people of his generation sinned out of arrogance, and Noach lacked that kind of arrogance. Rather, he was a humble person, and because of that he was saved from the flood. According to this interpretation, Noach was humble in the generation of the flood, as well. Although, as we have seen, both the Meshech Chochmah and the Beis Yisroel offer reasons for the necessity of Noach being humble, I would like to offer an additional, more essential one, based on the remarks of Rav Amnon Bazak in his *Nekudas Pesicha* and, more importantly, of Rav Shlomo Goren in his *Toras HaMikra*.

Rav Bazak notes that the building instructions for the ark that God gave to Noach are strikingly similar to the instructions for the building of the ark in the mishkan that God gave to Moshe. In both cases, the dimensions of length, width and height are given, in that order. Moreover, Noach is told to cover the ark inside and out with pitch, and Moshe is told to cover the ark both inside and out with gold. In addition, Noach is told to finish the ark to a cubit from above, and Moshe is told to place a covering of an amah's width on top of the ark. Rav Bazak suggests that the similarities point to the fact that both arks marked places of contact between man and God. The ark in the mishkan housed the tablets of the Torah, through which God revealed His Torah to the nation of Israel, and the ark that Noach built served as the place in which served as the place in which the remnant of mankind that was saved

from the flood encountered God. Rav Bazak then goes on to explain the differences between the two arks. Although these differences are important in their own right, they are not relevant to our discussion, and I therefore refer the interested reader to Rav Bazak's work.

It is, however, remarkable that Rav Bazak does not make reference to the Zohar (volume 1, 59b), which explicitly states that Noach's ark was actually a representation, as it were, of the ark of the covenant on high. The Zohar demonstrates this by pointing to citing God's words to Noach, "I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark" (Bereishis, 6:18). Just as the ark in the mishkan is referred to the ark of the covenant, says the Zohar, so was the ark of Noach. Rav Goren does cite this Zohar, and goes on to explain what this covenant actually was. He cites the Ramban in parshas Terumah, who says that the aron, housed in the mishkan which contained the tablets of the Torah, served as a means of perpetuating the revelation of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Similarly, after Noach and his family left the ark, there was, for the first time in history, a formal, public acceptance of the seven mitzvos incumbent upon all of mankind to fulfill. Even though Adam had been given six of these mitzvos, there was never any formal covenant made in connection with their acceptance with the earth's inhabitants before the flood. As a result, when mankind continued to flaunt these mitzvos, the world was no longer able to exist.

Rashi, in parshas Bereishis, cites a midrash which says that God made the existence of the world conditional on the acceptance of the Torah by the Jews. Until that event, there still needed to be some kind of spiritual connection between man and God that would maintain the universe, which could not exist as a physical entity alone. When mankind openly flaunted all of the mitzvos that had been given to them through Adam, the only connection remaining was that of Noach. After the flood, God made a formal covenant with the survivors, in front of the ark which had served as their shelter. To accept the seven mitzvos. By virtue of that covenant, the world was able to endure until the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Mt. Sinai, and then placed the tablets of the Torah in the aron and placed it in the mishkan, to perpetuate the experience of that covenant, thus facilitating the continued existence of the world.

Following Rav Goren's explanation of the similarities between the ark of Noach and the ark of Moshe, we can better understand the need for Noach to exhibit the character trait of humility. Just as Moshe, who brought the

Torah to the Jewish nation, was the humblest of all men, so, too, Noach, who served as the human end of the covenant made in regard to the seven mitzvos incumbent upon all of mankind to observe, needed to be a humble person. I believe that the reason for this need is that acceptance of God's mitzvos requires an attitude of submission to His will, refraining from imposing one's own concept of what is right and what is wrong onto the code of conduct revealed by God. As we noted in Netvort to parshas Bereishis (available at Torahheights.com) this was, according to Rav Shimshon

The Real Meaning of Yichus

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on October 23, 2014)

In Parshas Noach, we have a famous ma'ase. *Va-yar Cham, avi Kenaan, es ervas aviv, va-yaged le-shnei echav bachutz*. Clearly, Kenaan showed some form of serious disrespect for his father, no matter what actually transpired there. And as a result, Noach cursed him: *Arur Kenaan, eved avadim yihiye le-echav*. He was punished with slavery. Why did he incur this specific punishment? See Rashi for one explanation. However, the Rav explained: What's the *ikar* of being an eved? We tend to think that slavery means working hard and not having personal time for leisure—which is clearly true. But, on a deeper, existential level, the Rav quotes a Gemara, which says that an eved does not have *yichus*—in terms of having relatives. What does it mean? Is it like what is described in Uncle Tom's Cabin, when the white people say that black people don't love their children the same way they do? No! Biologically, in terms of emotional attachment, of course, they are relatives—they relate to them in the same way. What difference does it make if you are an eved or a free person? But the Rav says, that's not what *yichus* is. *Yichus* is not just a term that describes a mother who loves her kids, etc. All mammals have that. *Yichus* is something much deeper than that. It means that I received a *mesorah*. I am a link in the chain of history and part of a chain of transmission of Torah. I am part of the chain of history of Am Yisroel. Goyim also have *yichus*. They also feel proud to be a part of a chain of transmission of culture and values of their nation. *Yichus* means I have a father, and I have a son. I am passing on to my son the most proper and accurate values that I have received from my father. *Yichus* doesn't only mean having emotional relationships and nice things in life. *Yichus* means that we are part of something greater

Raphael Hirsch, the essence of Chava's sin when she ate from the tree of knowledge. Instead of following God's guidelines for what is good and bad, she followed her own perception that the tree was good, and transgressed God's command. Thus began the slow fall of mankind, until it reached the state it was in at the time of the flood. Noach, in establishing the covenant with God and accepting the seven mitzvos on behalf of mankind, did so humbly, submitting to God's will and recognizing that He is the final arbiter of what is good for man and what is bad for him.

than ourselves. We are coming from someplace, and we are going somewhere. And that is the true meaning of *Yichus*.

An eved has no *yichus*. He does not come from someplace, and he is not going anywhere. *Ein bo yichus*, means that he is not part of any chain. He is just adrift in the flow of history; he doesn't have any *mesorah*; he is not part of any long-term story. And the Rav says: Why was *avdu*s the punishment of Cham. It's very *pashut*. Cham's *aveira* was lack of *Kibud Av*—he didn't show proper respect for his father. Cham says, I am not accepting *mesorah* from my father, I am not part of any chain, I don't have to look up to my father. I am not coming from any place. I am my own man. He refused to acknowledge the *mesorah* that came from his father and which he could pass on to future generations. He refused to be part of the great chain of history. Once Cham said, "I am not part of that chain," naturally, his destiny was *eved avadim yihiye le-echav*. Being a *ben chorin* doesn't just mean having leisure. Being a *ben chorin* means being part of a chain, part of a story, being part of history. And we, unlike Cham, celebrate our *cheirus*. Even when we were *avadim* in *Mitzrayim*, we were not really *avadim*. We were *bnei chorin* who were just *mishubadim le-Pharaoh be-Mitzrayim*. Of course, our being *bnei chorin* is not about having leisure—which is very nice and important in itself. It's about participating in a grand story of *Torah tziva lanu Moshe Morasha kehilos Yakov*, about this *Morasha* which goes back all the way to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, to Har Sinai, and to our fathers, who passed it on to us. It's about the pride in living up to that legacy. And then passing it on to our children, and them passing it to their children, and so on, to the very end of time—until *bi'as Goel Tzedek*.

Why do People Sin?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Planet Earth is covered with boundless water and no dry land is visible. No terrestrial creatures can inhabit this watery chaos. Birds circle overhead. Finally, the waters retreat, and life can commence. This scene depicts the original creation of our planet. Everything was covered by a watery void until Hashem retracted the watery abyss. But this scene also portrays the conclusion of the flood. Life for Noah and his family could only be restarted once the waters receded and the land dried. Noah's exit from the ark parallels the initial creation of Bereishit. The world is being reborn anew- hopefully with better results.

Though the two stories are similar, there is one major difference: On the third day of creation, Hashem ordered the waters to contract into specifically designed ocean regions. Powerfully, the sprawling waters rushed across sweeping continents headlong for their ocean beds. This sudden and violent rush of waters sculpted the earth: riverbeds carved out canyons, while ferocious torrents of water chiseled cliffs and mountains from solid rock. Rapidly and relentlessly, the waters coarsed across landmasses obeying divine command.

By contrast, the waters of the flood withdrew slowly and gradually. After 190 days, the anxious waters quieted, but only 17 days later did Noah's ship finally settle upon a mountain peak. About a month and half later, most tall mountain summits peeked through the water. All this was unbeknown to Noah who was still too frightened to even open a small latch to inspect the scene. A full forty days later Noah finally opened a window, launching his birds to gather intel about his swamped planet. This peculiar tale of two birds is showcased by the Torah to highlight the difference between the rapid retreat of the waters in Bereishit and the gradual and staged ebbing of the waters of Noah. This strange "ballet of birds" symbolizes Noah's struggle to predict the future of a volatile world.

Noah had experienced an apocalyptic nightmare, witnessing both the devastation of an entire planet as well as the annihilation of the entire human and animal population. For months, traumatized and cloistered within his dark and damp lifeboat, he dared not open a window to the surrounding madness. Finally, summoning the courage to open a window, he sought a small degree

of certainty. Perhaps by dispatching bird messengers, he could assess the rate of water recession and plan his date of disembarkation. Perhaps the birds could help him calculate the trajectory of the flood, assisting him in planning the end of his unbearable quarantine. Noah, frightened by the mayhem and chaos of the planetary upheaval, desperately wants a schedule or an itinerary. Perhaps his birds could provide a general timeline for the future. Unfortunately, his great hopes would be dashed.

Sadly, his project met with mixed results. The raven- his first agent- provided absolutely no relevant information. It is unclear whether this shadowy messenger was even willing to accept the frightening mission of flying away from the safety of the ark. It hovered near the ark, swooping toward and soaring away, worried by the watery uncertainty. Switching to a dove. Noah assumed that its "homing instincts" would enable it to travel greater distances buoyed by the confidence that it could trace its way back home. The first "dove mission" ended in complete failure as the bird returned empty-beaked. Even the second "dove mission" wasn't a rousing success. The olive twig informed Noah of something which had already transpired three months earlier. Only at this stage in mid-Elul, does Noah ascertain that the waters had "eased". The Torah already informed us that the waters had soothed in in early Sivan! Noah is behind the curve discovering events months after they occurred.

The third and final mission of the dove also provides vague information. The dove doesn't return: Did the dove discover a nest or did it drown from the weariness of a third straight flight? We may know the answer to this question, but did Noah? Even if the dove had found a stable nesting area, how long would it take for the waters completely disappear? Additionally, how long would it take for the earth to dry and for the land to once again be inhabitable. After four different attempts to predict the date of his exit from the ark, Noah is still clueless!! His birds have supplied scant information. What little information has been provided is outdated!

With great irony, the Torah announces the complete vanishing of the waters- on Rosh Hashanah, the very day of the inconclusive third mission of the dove. Noah received no prior information of this long-awaited event. Despite his

great efforts he was unable to gather any info about the rate of water recession nor about the drying out period. Finally, close to two months later the ground completely dries and he exits the ark. All of Noach's efforts to predict the conclusion of the flood are futile. Even though the flood waters ebbed gradually the pace couldn't be accurately gauged. Even Noach's birds, who can hover above the muddy waters- can't help him gaze beyond the horizon.

Human beings crave certainty in life. Living in a haphazard world can be terrifying. Ancient Man lived in a completely random and unpredictable world, at the complete mercy of undetectable and puzzling phenomena. Over the centuries, science equipped us with knowledge and tools to organize our world and stabilize our condition by predicting Nature. We successfully converted a world of fluke and serendipity into an organized "cosmos" driven by rational and predictable systems. Science doesn't just enable analysis and investigation. By understanding our world, we can exploit its potential and improve the human condition.

Statistics has taken predictability one step further: not

The Offspring of The Righteous

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Noach, we learn of the deluge that inundated the world, destroying all life forms, save for Noach, his wife Na'ama, their three sons and their wives, and the animals in the teyva (ark). After the world was washed away, and the flood waters receded, Noach and his family emerged from the ark and began the daunting task of rebuilding the world. As a sign of His promise that He would never again flood the entire world, Hashem placed a rainbow in the clouds.

The opening pasuk of the parsha tells us: אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדַרְתָּיו אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלְּךְ נֹחַ *these are the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation, Noach walked with G-d* (Bereishis 6:9).

Why does the verse begin by stating that 'these are the offspring of Noach' and then diverge into a description of Noach's righteousness, instead of listing the names of his sons - Shem, Cham and Yafes - as we would have expected?

Rashi (ibid) famously answers: לְפָדֶךָ שֶׁעָמַד תּוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים מְעֻשִׂים טוֹבִים *to teach you that the main offspring of a righteous person are his good deeds.*

Rashi is teaching us that the everlasting legacy of the

only can inanimate Nature, be predicted but also human-behavior which appears to be personal and random- can be charted. Predictive algorithms about human behavior helps us "conduct" our world, by engineering financial markets, city planning, public health administration and numerous other arenas of human experience.

However, human experience at its core, remains delicate and unpredictable. The past two years have exposed this unchanging reality- all expectations and predictions failed to foretell this pandemic and its repercussions. Society mobilized to conquer this virus but even our best predictions were debunked by mutations, variants, anti-vaxxers and multiple other unforeseen factors. We have all been re-conditioned to live our lives with a higher degree of uncertainty.

Religious-minded people aren't terrified by uncertainty. Our one abiding certainty is our faith in G-d and our confidence in his care for humanity. If anything, uncertainty about human predictive models and human conventions spotlights the only actual certainty of life- our faith and our relationship with Hashem.

righteous is not their biological children, as we actually might expect. It is, rather, their good deeds, the way they lived their lives, and the positive impact they made in the lives of others.

The best example of this is Moshe Rabbeinu, who - by the word of G-d - separated from his wife and children to lead the people. And yet, he lives on in each and every generation through the holy Torah he brought, and taught, to the nation.

In more recent times, gedolim such as the Chazon Ish (1878-1953) zt'l, zy'a, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe (1902-1994) zt'l, zy'a, live on - not in the biological children they were never blessed with - but in their Torah and ma'asim tovim, whose rewards, longevity and eternity are infinite and boundless, producing spiritual peiros (fruits) in each and every generation.

However, there is a deeper understanding to this Rashi, which enlightens us to the connection between a person's children and their ma'asim tovim, their good deeds.

In his Short and Sweet on the Parsha (Feldheim, p.13-14), R' Shlomo Zalman Bregman writes:

‘These are the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation’ (Bereishis 6:9). Rashi cites the famous medrash that even more so than one’s children, the main offspring of a person is his good deeds.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l explains how the comparison between ma’asim tovim and offspring is apropos:

Just as one loves his children and helps them for that reason - and not just because he ‘has to’ - so too one should perform mitzvos out of love and not simply out of duty, because he ‘has to.’ As the pasuk says: ‘And you shall love the L-rd your G-d’ (Devarim 6:5). Rashi teaches: עֲשֵׂה דְבַרְיָו מֵאַהֲבָה - perform His word, keep His word, from love, and not from fear. When it comes to mitzvos and ma’asim tovim, the highest level of performance is one motivated by love of G-d, and love of fellow man.

Just as we love our children even when they fall short of our expectations - for a parent always loves his or her child, come what may - so too we should love the ma’asim tovim we have performed in the past, and not regret that we didn’t do things in a bigger and better fashion. It is true that there is always room for improvement, but we must be encouraged by the good deeds of our past, realize their worth, and be inspired to perform even more good deeds in the future!

Just as a parent always analyzes his child to find

shortcomings that need to be corrected, and guides his child along the correct path in life, so too we should look at our ma’asim tovim with the same critical eye - finding what areas need to be corrected, and rerouting ourselves when necessary to ensure our good deeds are ‘on the right path’ in life.

Just as a parent works very hard to make sure his children lack nothing that they might need to become even bigger and better, so too we should toil over our deeds to improve them as far as humanly possible. We must toil in the realm of good deeds and acts of loving-kindness towards others, just as we toil in the realm of Torah learning, and l’havdil, in the realm of making a parnassah. In this way, we will ensure that just as our children’s needs are met, so too, our spiritual needs will be met.

The lasting legacy a person leaves in this world, as well as the עֵקֶר תּוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶם, one’s main offspring, are the spiritual fruits that we create when we engage in mitzvos and good deeds. And then, like a father’s love for his child, we will surely be loved by fellow man and beloved before G-d.

“It states in the Zohar: Every time a person performs a mitzva, The Blessed Holy One takes pride and says: ‘Such are the deeds of My children!’ And G-d recites praise about this person, as a father who speaks and repeats the words of his young child, who is beloved to him” (Loving and Beloved, by Simcha Raz, p.49).

Torah: Luminescent or Transparent?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

A forty-year old man named Akiva meets a woman and commits to study Torah in order to earn her hand. After more than twenty years of study he becomes Rabbi Akiva, the leading sage of his time, with a legacy of Torah that lasts down to today. (Ketuvot 62b-63a)

Shimon ben Lakish, a bandit, the head of a gang of bandits, sees a rabbi swimming in a river and admires his beauty. He learns that the rabbi has a sister, and pledges to abandon his lifestyle and go study Torah in order to win her hand. Rabbi Shimon ben Lak-ish goes on to become one of the leading lights and overarching halachic authorities of his generation. (Bava Metzia 84a)

These vignettes testify to what Torah (and attraction!) can do for a Jew - but we also have the other side of the coin. Achitofel was the greatest advisor to King David,

so great that his word was accepted as the word of G-d. Achitofel possessed a brilliant mind and a supreme knowledge of Torah. (Chagigah 15b) And yet - when King David’s son Avshalom rebelled against him, Achitofel joined the mutiny and gave Avshalom repugnant advice: to forcefully co-opt his father’s wives to demonstrate that he was serious about taking the throne, and to start a nation-wide sweep to kill his own father immediately. (Shemuel II 15-17) If Torah is such a positively transformative force, how could Achitofel, the great Torah genius, become so degraded?

One answer lies in understanding what Torah can and cannot do for us. Rabbeinu Bechaye (commentary to Shemot 28:15) noted that the Torah may be compared to the tzohar which Noach made for his ark.

G-d told Noach to make a tzohar for the boat, but

the Torah does not explain what this tzohar is, or does. (Bereishit 6:6) A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 31:12) provides two explanations: It was either a window, allowing sunlight into the Teivah, or a gem providing its own illumination. Either way, it provided light. [Gems may be viewed as providing light naturally via dispersion, fluorescence or aventurescence, but this midrash may view the tzohar gem as supernatural.]

The Torah can be like either version of the tzohar:

- The Torah can be a gem producing light for those who study it. A mid-rash says, “G-d looked in the Torah and created the world.” (Bereishit Rabbah 1:1) As Rabbi Chaim of Vo-lozhin explained, the Torah is G-d’s declaration of creation, studying and practicing the Torah can mold us and create us anew. [See Nefesh haChaim 4:10-15.]
- On the other hand, if we do not allow the Torah to shape us then it is simply a window, not transforming a person but instead revealing that which is already inside. The Talmud notes that if a person studies Torah but doesn’t develop reverence for G-d and a strong character, then that Torah will be corrupted. Thus the Talmud states that Doeg, a chief justice of the Sanhedrin who became

a murderer, studied a great deal of Torah - but his Torah was “from the lips and outward.” He never allowed himself to be transformed. (Sanhedrin 106b)

We can make sure that the Torah will be a transformative gem for us, rather than a mere revelatory window, if we find those mitzvot that demand change, that demand we grow beyond ourselves. Certain mitzvot may suit us, and this is beautiful. [See Ha’amek Davar to Bamidbar 24:6.] But limiting ourselves to those mitzvot means that Torah is only a window to the daylight already pre-sent. For Torah to be transformative it must challenge us with a distant target, a goal that’s higher than I’ve reached before. [Indeed, Bava Metzia 32b teaches that one who has the opportunity to help an enemy or a friend should help the enemy; the Torah pushes us to over-ride our animosity.]

We are not doomed to be like Achitofel; we can be like Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish. Torah can be a transformative, illuminating tzohar gem for us. It will happen if we aren’t afraid of the challenge, if we instead rise to meet the Torah’s challenges and use them as tools for our growth.

Parenting from the Parsha: Caring for Others

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

In the beginning of this week’s Parsha, a relatively famous Gemara mentioned by Rashi prompts additional thought and consideration.

Commenting on the Torah’s description of Noach as a righteous man “*b’dorosav*”, “in his generation”, Rashi cites the Gemara Sanhedrin 108a which quotes two ways to understand the seemingly superfluous comment “*in his generation*”. Some argue that it is meant as extra praise- that if Noach managed to be righteous even though he lived in a generation of sinners, he certainly would have been even greater had he lived in Avraham’s generation of tzaddikim. Others contend that “in his generation” is actually a criticism- that he was only righteous compared to his generation of sinners. However, had he lived in Avraham’s generation, compared to Avraham and the other tzaddikim of that generation, Noach would not have been considered righteous.

The Gemara’s comparison of Avraham to Noach brings

to the forefront a fundamental question that we should be thinking about as we read through these parshiyot. Why exactly does G-d choose Avraham to be the father of His chosen nation? What was it about Avraham that convinced Hashem that he was the one, as opposed to the many other tzaddikim that came before him, particularly Noach, who the text identifies as a “*tzaddik tamim*”, “completely righteous” person?

I would like to focus on one answer given to this question by many commentaries. They point out that if we look carefully at the lives of both Avraham and Noach, a crucial pattern emerges. Noach was a great man, but he was “self-focused”- his only concern throughout his life was caring for himself and his family. In contrast, Avraham was “other-focused”- throughout his life, he looked to help and impact upon those around him.

G-d tells Noach to build an ark because He is going to destroy the world, while he and his family will be

saved, and Noah does exactly what G-d tells him. He doesn't challenge G-d to try and save others- nor does He attempt to influence those around him. He worries solely about himself and his family- and saves those whom G-d commands him to save.

In a somewhat similar situation, G-d informs Avraham that He is going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Amora. Although Avraham and his family will not be impacted negatively, Avraham's automatic response is to challenge G-d in order to save the citizens of the threatened cities.- "*Hashofeit Kol Ha'aretz Lo Yaase Mishpat?*," "will the arbiter of Justice not act justly?" Avraham's argument to Hashem borders on the disrespectful- but is fueled by his care and concern for his fellow man, and his desire to do what he can to help them. His love for others pushes him to challenge Hashem.

Another case in point. Avraham discovers G-d- something which he recognizes as great and extraordinary. However, his reaction is to not to pull away and insulate himself from those around him, but instead to set up a tent with four open sides, in order to share his newfound gift with those around him.

This, suggest many, is why G-d chose Avraham. As great a tzaddik as Noah may have been, Hashem realized that the father of the Jewish people needed to be someone who was not just great and righteous, but someone whose life was defined by chessed, by care and concern for those around him- someone whose entire essence was centered around helping others.

In Pirkei Avot 1:14 Hillel famously declares, "*im ein ani li, mi li? uk'sheani l'atzmi, mah ani?*"- "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am [only] for myself, then what am I? First and foremost, a person needs to understand their uniqueness- that if they don't bring into the world what they are meant to bring, then no one else can replace them. However, Hillel doesn't stop there- he continues. If we are only focused on ourselves, if we don't take who we are, and who we have become, and share that with others, then "*mah ani*", what are we as people and as individuals?

We have noted before that one of the unique challenges of our generation, the "selfie" and "I" generation, is the total focus on oneself, and one's own personal needs. We live in a world of complete personalization- where everything a person has, and does, is customized to their specific wants and needs. On social media, everyone shares their

personal opinion about all things going on in the world, as if each person is an expert on all topics. And while this focus on one's self has led to some positive outcomes- as people are generally more "self-aware" and more in touch with their own personal needs- it has led to many negative consequences as well. One particularly problematic result of this societally manufactured narcissism is an inability to respect another person's needs or viewpoints- it's become much harder for kids (and adults!) to share with others, or to tolerate those who disagree with their opinions.

As we raise our kids in today's world, we must push hard against these trends. Children naturally grow up self-absorbed and egocentric, and if left to their own devices, their selfishness and self-centeredness could well continue throughout their lives- especially in today's self-centered society. From an early age, therefore, we must cultivate within our children a sense of the "other". It is crucial for us to imbue within our children, from a very young age, an ability to see beyond themselves and to care for the needs of others. While we must absolutely make sure that our children have a healthy dose of self-esteem and are able to take care of themselves and fulfill their own personal needs, we have to also ensure that we plant within them an ability to recognize the value of someone else's needs, and a respect for the viewpoints of others. By raising our kids to be aware of others, and to help and care for those around them, we encourage them to actualize the G-dly spark within their own souls, and we enable them to experience the wonderful feeling that can only come through helping another. We also prepare them for life- inculcating within them an ability to make friends, have healthy relationships, create a strong marriage, and raise a family.

As we see in this week's parsha, Noah was a great man, an "*ish Tzadik tamim*", a "a completely righteous man". But he was missing one major ingredient that had to be present within the father of the Jewish people- a natural inclination to care for, and live for, those around him. Avraham, the prototypical "*ish chessed*", personified this trait through and through- and perhaps this is why G-d ultimately chose him as our forefather. It is this trait that we must strive to cultivate within our children, particularly in a generation where such sensitivity and compassion is so extremely rare.

Noach's Unexpected Appearance

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

Although the narrative of Noach and the Mabul (Flood) is presented primarily in Parshas Noach, the initial part of this story is featured in Parshas Bereshis: "And Hashem saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and that the entire inclination of his thoughts was negative on a constant basis. And Hashem regretted that He created man, and He was saddened (by man's deeds). And Hashem said, 'I will wipe out man, whom I created, from the face of the earth – from man to beast'... And Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem." (Bereshis 6:5-8)

Why does the beginning of the story of Noach and the Mabul start in Parshas Bereshis?

The actions of man (and of the animal kingdom) that precipitated the Mabul were not merely acts of great sin; rather, they were acts that wholly distorted and reversed the very Creation itself. We read a bit earlier in Parshas Bereshis (ibid. v. 2): "... and they took to themselves wives from all that they chose", which Rashi, quoting Medrash Bereshis Rabbah, explains as "even the wives of other people; even males and beasts". In other words, the basics of Creation, such as marital fidelity, hetero relationships, and adherence to the natural order as decreed and established by Hashem, were being overturned. As Rashi further invokes from Medrash Bereshis Rabbah (on ibid. 6:12), even animal life was violating the natural order. Hence, the world needed to be largely destroyed and restarted, as the very Creation was being overturned by the conduct of man and animal.

Viewed from this perspective, the Mabul was not only a punishment, but it was a perforce response to Creation voluntarily capsizing itself and sabotaging its mandate.

We can now understand why the account of Noach and the Mabul commences in Parshas Bereshis rather than in Parshas Noach, for the acts which caused the Mabul comprised a mass defiance and subversion of Creation; the Mabul was essentially the result of man's and animal's

undoing of Creation, and not merely a punitive response to sin.

There is yet another connection here to Parshas Bereshis; that connection is Noach himself.

Unlike Avrohom Avinu, who was raised in a home of idolatry and who was from a pagan background, until he discovered Hashem on his own, Noach was actually of esteemed religious pedigree. Noach's grandfather was the tzaddik Mesushelach, Noach's father was Lemech (the second Lemech), who was likewise a believer in Hashem (v. Bereshis 5:29, with Seforno), and Noach's great-grandfather was Chanoch, who was a righteous man (with a weakness – v. Rashi from Medrash Bereshis Rabbah on Bereshis 5:24). Noach had a serious mesorah (religious tradition) of faith and service of Hashem, even if Noach's commitment might not have measured up to that of Avrohom.

Furthermore, Noach's role, as per Lemech's aspiration or prayer, was to restore the inorganic world to the state that existed before the sin of Adam, and Noach actually succeeded in doing that, by inventing the plough and thereby removing the curse upon the earth that resulted from Adam's sin. (V. Rashi from Medrash Tanchuma on ibid. v. 29; but v. Rashi from Medrash Bereshis Rabbah on Yechezkel 14:14.) What emerges is that Noach, in terms of his righteousness and restoration of the inorganic world to a pre-sin state, became a reflection of Adam before the sin.

Noach was the new Adam, who was charged with salvaging the world from its own undoing and returning it to its intended role, as per Hashem's will upon Creation. This is precisely why Noach's background and early accomplishments must be featured in Parshas Bereshis rather than in Parshas Noach.

As we know, the world under Noach did not totally fulfill its mission, yet Noach's greatness planted the seeds that would eventually sprout and flourish into the beautiful tree of Avrohom Avinu and the Jewish People.

The 'Myth' of the Great Flood

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Parashat Noah, the story of the flood, is a truly-intriguing Torah portion. Secular scholars, however, often speak of the story of the flood as if it were a

myth, or a fairy tale.

Not surprisingly, several ancient documents report striking parallels to the story of the flood. Perhaps,

the most famous document is the Babylonian “Epic of Gilgamesh” which tells the story of a man by the name of Utnapishtim. The “gods” decide to destroy the earth, there is a great flood, and because Utnapishtim is the favorite of Eau, one of the gods, he is saved.

Despite the strong parallels between the “Epic of Gilgamesh” and the Torah’s story of Noah, they are in fact strikingly different. In the Babylonian story, the gods arbitrarily decide to destroy the earth as if it were a plaything. Furthermore, the gods choose to save Utnapishtim only because he’s a “favorite” of theirs, not because he is worthy of being saved.

In effect, the Torah revolutionizes the flood story by introducing what is most significant—the element of moral accountability. The world is flooded not because G-d arbitrarily decides to destroy the world, but because the world had become corrupt and destructive. Noah is not arbitrarily saved. He is rescued only because he is deserving. He is, after all, referred to by the Torah, Genesis 6:9, as an *איש צדיק* and *בְּדֹרֹתָיו הָיָה בְּדָרְתָיו*, he is a righteous person who was perfect in his generation. In fact, it says of Noah, *אֵת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ*, that Noah walked with G-d.

According to tradition, Noah not only builds an ark, but when people pass by and ask Noah what he is doing, he tells them that he is building an ark because the world is going to be flooded due to the peoples’ evil ways. The Midrash Tanchuma 5, relates that in order to give the people an opportunity to repent, the building of the ark continues for 120 years. Finally, Noah enters the ark with his wife, 3 sons, and their wives. Once they’re in the ark, G-d waits an additional 7 days before bringing the flood, again, to give the people an opportunity to repent. And even when it begins to rain, the Torah (Genesis 7:12), relates that, *וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל הָאָרֶץ*, implying that when the rain started it fell lightly. Even at this point, G-d would have reversed His decision and stopped the flood had the people only repented. But, alas, they did not.

It rains for 40 days and 40 nights. Noah and his family are charged with the unenviable task of caring for all the animals in the ark, not only for 40 days and nights, but, in fact, for an entire year, until the earth is sufficiently dry.

The Torah describes an unusual reaction on Noah’s part at the conclusion of that year. After caring for all the animals—a full year of feeding and cleaning, G-d tells Noah (Genesis 8:15-16), *צֵא, מִן הַתֵּבָה*, “Noah, get out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your daughters-

in-law!” Can you imagine, after being trapped in the ark, in this stench-ridden vessel, for a full year, G-d has to command Noah, *צֵא, מִן הַתֵּבָה*, “Get out of the ark!?” A normal person would have jumped out of his skin to get out of the ark. But Noah is hesitant to leave.

Elie Wiesel offers a poignant insight. Wiesel calls Noah the first “survivor.” The world had, in effect, experienced a Holocaust, and Noah is reluctant to walk out of the ark because he knows that the entire world is one giant graveyard, the final resting place of all the people whom he had known. Noah knows that if he left the ark, he would be walking on the remains of his neighbors and friends—and he could not face it!

The story continues. After giving thanks to G-d and bringing sacrifices, the Torah states (Genesis 9:20), *וַיִּהְיֶה כְּרֹם*, Noah’s first activity after the flood is to begin to plant. Planting after a great destruction is surely a meaningful response, representing hope and belief in the future. But what does Noah plant? He plants a vine. Scripture (Genesis 9:21), then informs us, *וַיִּשְׁתֶּה*, Noah drinks the wine of the vineyard, *מִן הַיַּיִן*, he becomes drunk, *וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אֹהֱלָה*, and he wallows in the muck in his tent. Poor Noah, couldn’t face the fact that everybody except for himself and his immediate family had been wiped out by the flood. Noah needed an escape—and resorts to alcohol. He’s unable to face reality! He cannot work, he cannot function. Emotionally paralyzed, Noah becomes a drunkard.

Noah’s response to the flood is not dissimilar to the reactions of some Holocaust survivors in our own times. Some survivors were simply incapable of facing the fact that they were singled out to live, while their beloved friends and relatives, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters, had all perished.

What are the reactions of those who behold Noah in this desperate state?

The Torah records (Genesis 9:18), that Noah had three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafet. In the biblical text, Cham is always referred to as *אַבְי כְּנַעַן* – “*Avi Canaan*,” the father of Canaan. The Torah relates (Genesis 9:22), that when Noah was inebriated, Cham, *Avi Canaan*, the father of Canaan, “saw his nakedness” and told his two brothers outside. The Rabbis say that the biblical expression “to see a person’s nakedness” often has sexual connotations. In fact, they say that Cham did not just see his father’s nakedness and mock his father, but that he actually sodomized or castrated his

father. He then went and told his brothers. Cham says to his siblings, “Our father is a drunk. This survivor, is incapable of facing reality, he’s become a vegetable, he’s a worthless drunk!”

But, the two remaining sons of Noah, Shem and Yafet, appalled by Cham’s actions, take a cloak, put it on their own backs, and while walking backwards so they could not see their father, cover their father’s nakedness.

The Bible then relates (Genesis 9:24), that when Noah awoke from his stupor, from his inebriation, וַיֵּדַע אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לּוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן, that he knew what his youngest son, Cham, had done to him. Noah cries out (Genesis 9:25), אָרִיר כְּנָעַן, “*May Canaan be cursed!*” Oddly enough, Noah doesn’t curse his son, Cham, he curses his own grandson, Cham’s son, Canaan. וַיְהִי לְאֶחָיו, עֶבֶד עַבְדִּים, “*May he always be enslaved to his brothers.*”

Very intriguing. Why does Noah curse his grandson

and not his son? Perhaps it is because, of all the children, Cham was the only one who was himself already a father. Cham should have been acutely aware of how difficult it is to be a parent. Of all the children, Cham should have been most sensitive to Noah’s plight. Yet, he was the least sensitive! And Noah says, “if that’s the way you behave, if that’s the model you provide your children, if you respond to a person in need by acting callously and insensitively, the end result will inevitably be that your own child, Canaan, will be a slave. Just like you, he will be unable to control himself. He’ll be a slave to his own passions and needs, just as you are yourself.”

The story of the flood is not a myth. It is an extraordinary narrative replete with invaluable and fascinating insights, as is the entire Torah. All we need do is study and review it, and in it we shall find profound and resounding insights into all human life and human relations.