

Noach 5777

BS"D Parashat Noach 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

In Deep Waters

There are two sequential verses in this week's parasha (chapter 6:10-11) without any apparent connection.

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And Noach bore three sons: Shem, Cham and Yefet: And the land (society) became corrupt before the Lord and the land was filled with thievery (deception).

Why does the verse dealing with the corrupt state of society appear adjacent to the verse informing us of Noach's three sons?

The Torah is not the recording secretary of historians; but in its subtle way, even the very order in the verses is replete with information.

We know from the first verse in the parasha that Noach was a Tzadik (a righteous man). It is also common knowledge that in order to reach the level of "tzadik", one must labor long and arduously away from the distractions of society – especially the hedonistic one in which Noach lived. So it would be safe to assume that Noach, at least during the latter part of his life, led a monastic existence where he focused his attention on spirituality and the study of that part of the Torah which was carried by tradition from the days of Adam.

I submit that the sequence of the verses is to inform us that

Noach was unaware of how low society had fallen, but learned of the world surrounding him from what he perceived from his own children.

His first son, Shem, went in the holy ways of his father. Cham was perverted and depraved, as we learn from his conduct in the ark. Although Yefet did not reach the depths of depravity, which were the accepted standard of that generation, he was involved in the esthetic side of life more than in its moral and spiritual aspects.

Noach saw the friends Cham and Yefet "hung out" with. He smelled the alcohol on his sons' breath when they returned home in the early hours of the morning, and felt a sense of great disillusionment when the two would bicker over who would get the car on Saturday night. He suspected them of using drugs, of viewing unsavory material on the internet and cable T.V. These two sons spoke to Noach and their mother, Na'ama, with chutzpa. All this, and more, had taught Noach that it was no longer the world of his childhood and of the moral standards upon which he had based his life, but rather a subversion of that world.

Hence the Torah writes: Three sons were born to Noach – Shem, Cham and Yefet: And the land (society) became corrupt before the Lord and the land was filled with thievery (deception).

Whenever I am present at a simcha of our children and grandchildren (engagements, weddings, etc.) I look around the table at the young personalities who are the friends of our family.

These young men and women are part of the greatest generation our nation has produced in over 2000 years. The boys are all talmidim in hesder yeshivot or kollels of the dati-leumi philosophy. They all served or will soon serve in Tzahal in order to perform, in total conviction, the greatest mitzva of our times – the defense of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael.

The young women are educated in Torah as in no previous generation. Most are erudite in Halacha, Jewish thought and above all Jewish modesty and yirat shamayim.

The young people, products of the dati-leumi educational system, serve HaShem in joyful happiness. The boys are physically strong and mentally healthy. Most have traversed every centimeter of this land on foot, as did Avraham Aveinu, to let the land know that Rachel's prayer of "the sons shall return to their borders" has been answered. Their many years in the yeshiva world have not effeminated them; you would not want to meet them in a dark alley when they are in a bad mood. In time, they will fill all the functions of a healthy Torah society: rabbis, teachers, scientists, pilots, farmers and construction workers.

You would not hear their words of Torah spoken at the table – in beautiful Ivrit of course – at similar celebrations in Lakewood, New Jersey or Manchester, England. There were no suits or ties, and the dresses of the young women were not the last word out of the Boro Park fashion shows. They did not have tent-like black hats put over their ears at the age of 13 to steal from them their beautiful years of youth, but led the natural lives of youngsters growing in mental and physical strength.

Beauty shone in their faces – the faces of people who will be the leaders in the next generation in Eretz Yisrael.

Indeed, their parents did not pay \$15,000 a year in elementary school and \$25,000 in high school, and after 12 years of Torah education get back a child with a diploma in Torah ignorance, barely able to read Hebrew and certainly not a page of Gemara. They did not have girlfriends at the age of 14, but met the opposite sex only after deciding that the time had come to establish their own homes.

These young men and women are the product of Torat Eretz

Yisrael (the Torah of the holy land). They are like the students and soldiers of King David.

I feel so proud that my family is part of this segment in our society. And, as I do every moment of my life, I offer a prayer of thanksgiving to HaShem for having given my wife and me the courage and sense to come home 54 years ago.

The Lesson of the Deep Waters

People don't change much. Our dress and eating habits might vary, but the basic nature of man does not.

I can imagine what transpired at the time of Noach by simple juxtaposition of our leaders today and those of Noach's time.

Noach, who is a well-known figure, entreats the people of his society to change their corrupt ways or suffer the destruction of humanity. The serious among them go to their spiritual mentors to discuss Noach's threats. The answers they receive probably sounded something like the following:

One *gadol* (highly revered rabbi) of their society says: "Rubbish. If by some chance there is a pending calamity, the gods will send us a Mashiach to carry us on the wings of eagles to high ground."

Another *gadol* answers: "There is no *chiyuv* (obligation) to move to higher ground, although one who does can be considered to have done a meritorious act."

And a third *gadol* refuses to discuss the issue, saying that it is irrelevant and he never brings up the matter in his sermons.

Then one day it began to drizzle. And the drizzle turned to light rain. Then the waters began to come down in earnest. HaShem commanded Noach to enter the ark together with his

family and certain chosen of the animal kingdom, and to be sure to lock the door hermetically.

The people saw the waters rising steadily as they ran to their holy sites to seek salvation from their gods. Their gedolim (highly revered rabbis) told them not to worry, "there have been cloud bursts before and will be again," they said.

But when the common people left the compounds of the holy places, their religious leaders were already on their way to the highest points overlooking the plains of Mesopotamia.

From their vantage point, the holy leaders saw the ark floating above the surging, scorching waters, and they begin calling out in desperation to Noach to open the ark for them.

The rest is history. But, unfortunately, it has a way of repeating itself to those who refuse to learn from history.

Shabbat Shalom,

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