

Noach 5779

BS"D Parashat Noach 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Finding Favor versus Love

The Eretz Yisrael amora, Resh Lakish, is quoted in Sota 3a:

אין אדם עושה פשע אלא שרוח חסידות נכנס בו

"One does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of folly enters him."

An example of a sin performed out of folly is lying to HaShem. When a sinner repents for eating a non-kosher sandwich, he should not say that the sandwich was disgusting but should admit that it was tasty and that he regrets angering HaShem.

This being the case, how can a kohen say each day, "Blessed are You HaShem... Who has commanded us to bless His people Israel lovingly," when he does not know half the people in the synagogue?

Answer: Most of our prayers focus on requests that HaShem have mercy on us despite our spiritual deficiencies. However, the morning and evening blessings recited adjacent to the Shema are different, for their central theme is not compassion but HaShem's love for the Jewish people.

The difference between HaShem's love for us and His merciful compassion is what distinguished between HaShem's relationship to Avraham and His relationship to Noach. Avraham is the object of HaShem's love as we find in the Midrashim and the

Talmud. By contrast, regarding Noach, we do not find an expression of Divine love for him but rather expressions of compassion.

At the end of Parashat Bereishiet it says, "Noach found favor in HaShem's eyes" (6:8). "Finding favor" is far removed from "love".

The trait of "finding favor" helped Noach to be saved from the Flood, but at the same time, Noach suffered in the ark as one who is sentenced to a year of Gehennom.

Noach was aware that he had not merited HaShem's love. For that reason, when he exited the ark, he planted a vineyard whose sweet and intoxicating wine would allow him to escape from his new and unbearable reality. Love grants one strength and vitality. Noach's flight was a response to his having failed to reach the level of love reserved for the totally righteous.

Avraham, by contrast, completed his life satisfied and happy. He knew that HaShem related to him and would relate to his children after him with love, as it says (Bereishiet 25:8), "Avraham breathed his last and died at a good age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people."

In our time, we daily experience two expressions of HaShem's love for us:

1. HaShem removed us from the cursed exile and brought us to the Holy Land, and He defends us. The territory of the State of Israel is 1/650 of the territory of the Arab states. The population of our country numbers a little less than seven million Jews versus 350 million Arabs. At the same time, the Arabs are incapable of carrying out their dreams of destroying the Jewish State.
2. HaShem is paving the way to our establishing a kingdom of Torah in the Holy Land, such as has not existed since

the days of the sages of the Mishna. Indeed, these are expressions of HaShem's love and not crumbs of compassion.

When the kohanim recite blessings stating that they were commanded to "bless the Jewish People with love," they do not mean to say that they love all the people in shul, but that the people in shul shall merit HaShem's love.

In the Holy Land, our physical and spiritual survival depend on HaShem's love for His children. For that reason, the priestly blessing is heard daily throughout most of Israel and is not recited in the galut except for a number of days each year, for HaShem's love for His people burns only in the Land of Israel.

Noach's World

Rabbi Yochanan (Sanhedrin 108a) expounds regarding the Torah's utterance that Noach was "righteous in his generation" (Bereishiet 6:9), that "had he lived in another generation, he would not necessarily have been considered righteous." Rashi explains that had Noach lived in Avraham's time, Avraham's righteousness would have out-shined all of Noach's deeds. Yet Rabbi Yochanan and Rashi do not explain how Noach was less great than Avraham.

The key to understanding Noach the man is his having planted a vineyard when he left the ark. As stated above, Noach and his contemporaries achieved impressive technological developments. Forces of nature not yet discovered today were harnessed in Noach's time to serve mankind. For close to a thousand years, the multiplication table had not been taught in their schools. Peace and brotherhood reigned, resulting in the creation of a

materialistic society that rejected every shred of spirituality. From here the distance to moral deterioration and licentiousness was short.

At a certain moment, HaShem decided that the wisdom mankind had imbibed from the Tree of Knowledge was serving their evil impulses to the point of mankind losing the right to exist. Only one man out of all mankind preserved his divine image. It was one man against a world of violence, murder, idolatry and sexual sin.

According to our sages, Noach was famous in his generation as a man of science and technology whose genius had freed mankind of natural calamities that had previously struck them mercilessly. His scientific contributions were the basis for the generation's pleasant life. Yet Noach saw that his contemporaries had strayed from the spiritual traditions and had deteriorated into lives of licentiousness. He also understood that his many discoveries had contributed greatly to that deterioration, and he felt a personal responsibility to restore his contemporaries to the path of HaShem. Yet mankind was already beyond return.

At the end of a year of toil and suffering, the ark came to rest on the peak of the Ararat Mountain Range. Noach opened up the ship's hold and saw before him a world devoid of everything. He called out loud and his voice echoed off the depths of Ararat without a response. Noach struggled with his guilt feelings for his share in causing such a severe punishment, and the only path before him was to escape from the harsh reality through drunkenness and slumber. To accept the new reality and to build a new society in the best manner possible was not a practical alternative for him, leaving only escape into sweet, redemptive slumber.

Avraham discovered HaShem at a young age. He developed a belief system which he transmitted to tens of thousands who abandoned their faith in idolatry.

Avraham's spiritual universe was perfect. There was a Creator of the universe, and He demanded of people that they lead a moral life. Avraham was blessed with a son who had been educated to carry on in the pathway of HaShem until the entire world should accept faith in the one Creator. HaShem revealed Himself to Avraham through a command that he bring his only son as a burnt offering. Avraham's spiritual world was about to collapse. The command to a father to sacrifice his son totally contradicted Avraham's belief that HaShem was the source of kindness and mercy.

Noach was tested and failed, reaching the point of irreversible breakdown. Avraham, too, was brought to the breaking point, having to choose between his love for his only son and his love for HaShem. He could not resolve the contradiction. Yet unlike Noach, Avraham did not break down nor did he attempt to flee the terrible reality.

For three days, he advanced quietly and determinedly to Yerushalayim. Yitzchak asked him, "Here is the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for the offering?" (Bereishiet 22:7). Still Avraham did not break down, even as he lifted the knife to slaughter his son. Only then did the angel cry out, "Do not harm the boy! Do not do anything to him" (22:12).

The difference between Noach, righteous in his generation, and Avraham, righteous in every generation, is reflected in the breaking point. Noach broke down, finding no solution to his suffering but escape. Avraham experienced suffering, but not crises. He would never stray from the HaShem of love and kindness.

Every one of us is a descendant of Jews who did not break: The destruction of two Temples, wars, exile, pogroms, murders and humiliation perpetrated by the Catholic Church, the Russian Tzars, the Communists, Nazis and Moslems – our ancestors, male and female, suffered but were not broken.

The Jewish People once more find themselves undergoing a test of faith. Should they return to the Land of their Fathers, or should they remain in the exile and sacrifice their sons on the altars of gold and convenience?

In the future, historians will note that a small number of Jews physically blocked the advance of murderous Islam while building a national home in the Land of Israel. These Jews are not “righteous in their generation” but righteous by the yardstick of all the generations.

Shabbat Shalom,

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