

Windows of Opportunity: Lessons from the Ark and Its Architect
Parshat Noach 5779
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Two classic disputes animate the study of Parsha Noach from our earliest ages of learning the Parsha in school to our most sophisticated analysis of the saga as adults. The first *machloket* pertains to the quality of Noach's character, while the second pertains to the quality of life on the Ark.

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נח איש צדיק תמים הנה בדורתי את האלהים התהלך נח:

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בדורותיו - יש מרבתינו דורשים אותו לשבח, כל שכן שאלו היה בדור צדיקים היה צדיק יותר, ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי, לפי דורו היה צדיק, ואלו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב לכולם:

First, we are introduced to Noach as the *tsaddik* of his generation. Rashi cites a debate regarding what we should draw from this statement. According to some, Noach was great despite the influences around him. Had he lived in a generation of righteous people he would have been even greater a person. The second position holds that Noach was only great relative to the depravity of his time. Had he lived in the times of Avraham he would not have been considered much of anything.

[Why the generation of Avraham in particular? More on that in a few minutes..]

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צהר תעשה לתבה ואל אמה תכלנה מלמעלה ופתח התבה בצדה תשים תחתים שנים ושלישים תעשה:

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(טז) צהר - יש אומרים חלון, ויש אומרים אבן טובה המאירה להם:

Second, when Noach is commanded to build the Teivah he is instructed to include a *tzohar* for the purposes of illuminating the ark. Again Rashi cites a dispute as to the precise meaning of *tzohar*. According to the first opinion Noach was commanded to install a window (as seems clear from the end of the story). According to the second opinion, the *tzohar* was a precious stone, which somehow provided light to the ark from within.

On the surface these two classic comments of Rashi have nothing to do with one another. One is about life before the flood and the other is about life during. But in a

brilliant insight into our story, the Chattam Sofer in his *Torat Moshe* commentary to the Parsha, demonstrates that these two pieces of the story are inextricably linked to one another.

In two weeks from this Shabbos, we'll read about the remarkable efforts of Avraham Avinu save the people of Sodom from destruction. Hashem informs him of their sinful culture and pending judgment- and Avraham, despite his best efforts is unable to save anyone, other than his nephew Lot, and lots family. We all know what happens next. Lot's family is rushed from Sodom before it is overturned and the angel tells them to run and not look back. Lot's wife turns anyway is transformed into a pillar of salt.

What about Avraham? Where was he to be found on the day Sodom was overturned? Immediately after Lots' wife is punished for watching, the scene shifts back to the home of our Patriarch:

(כז) וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם אֶת פְּנֵי קְנוֹק:
(כח) וַיִּשְׁקֹף עַל פְּנֵי סֹדֶם וְעַמֹּרָה וְעַל כָּל פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכְּפֹר וַיֵּרָא וַהֲגִיחַ עָלֶיהָ קִיטָר הָאָרֶץ כְּקִיטָר הַכְּבֹשֶׁן:

Lot and his family are saved on the condition that they not stare and gawk in the destruction of others while they are being saved, but Avraham from afar is doing the exact opposite - watching the smoke rise from the town he failed to save. For Lot and his family to look back at Sodom, would be cruel and undeserved, but a tsaddik like Avraham who had given everything he had to spare them, not only can he watch, but perhaps he had to.

So, explains the Chatam Sofer, is the debate about Noach. **The question of whether the Teiva's light came from the a precious stone or a window is not answering the question of how light penetrated the Teivah on the inside, rather it is a debate about whether or not Noach was able to see what was going on, on the outside.** If Noach was saved merely because he was decent, because he was the best in bad world, if he really wasn't truly deserving, then he would have had no right to see the deluge flooding the world. But if he was truly righteous like Avraham, than perhaps he needed a window, so that he could see as his civilization's destruction unfolded.

Can you imagine, for just a moment, what Noach would have seen from his vantage point on the Teivah? First people drowning, then towns flooded to the brim, rubble and carnage in all directions - followed by the peace of a silent globe as he floated

about a civilization washed away. The New York Times offered an interactive model of Hurricane Michael's destruction before and after the storm this week. Shorelines changed, houses in ruins, utter destruction. One can't begin to imagine how much worse the view might have been from the Teivah. In fact, we'll never know.

One thing seems clear from reading the second half of our Parsha, that even if Noach had a window from the inside, he never looked outward. First we're told that after the rain stopped the water started to subside:

(ה) וְהַמַּיִם הָיוּ הַלֹּוֹךְ וַחֲסוּר עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעֲשִׂירֵי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רְאשֵׁי הַהָרִים

1. The mountains were visible, but we are never told that anyone saw them.
2. Some commentaries believe that Noach sent out a raven, a carnivorous bird, because he was worried about seeing the carnage of a drowned society. If the Raven came back having eaten flesh, Noach would have refused to exit.
3. Then he sends out a Yonah: לְרֵאוֹת הַקָּלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה - what doesn't Noach just look?
4. He reaches out with his hand to grab the Yonah but he never sticks out his head.
5. Only months after the Mabul was over did Noach have the courage, he removed the cover of the Teivah and for the first time: וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה תָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: - he saw nothing until the mabal was completely over.

What emerges from the text of our story when read properly, is that all this time that Noach was on the teivah, he just averted his eyes from the world around him. And it's for this reason that Chazal can't be sure exactly how to characterize him. In one sense Noach made a smart decision. In a society doomed for failure Noach kept his head down and thoughts far away. He avoided his world at its peak, and continued to escape it in its destruction. **But a true tsaddik does not avoid his world; he finds the wherewithal to confront it. Forcing Noach to install a window into his Teivah was a measured critique of his strategy - he had avoided trouble successfully, but he never tried to overcome it.**

I remember from my Yeshiva days hearing advice about the inappropriate things we sometimes see on the streets or in the stores. The Rebbe would say if you think there might be something inappropriate in your way take off your glasses. Rebbe, what should we do if we don't need glasses? The Rebbe says, find someone who has a pair and put his on.

There are many things in life for which we are better off just averting our eyes, but it takes courage to focus on the things we'd rather not see. There are people we'd rather avoid, decisions we'd rather kick down the road, and conversations we'd rather not start. In the short term, avoidance is a great tactic, but in the long term it always leaves us full of regret. In comparing Noach and Avraham, the Torah teaches us that the measure of the righteous is not the trouble they can avoid, but the evil they can overcome. Life is full of windows of opportunity, but if we don't have the courage to look through them, great opportunities might pass us by.

נת וחלוננו

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אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדִרְתּוֹ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נח:

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צַהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לְתִבְּהָ וְאֵל אֲמַה תִּכְלָנָה מִלְּמַעַלָּה וּפְתַח הַתִּבְּהָ בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשֵּׂים תַּחְתִּים שְׁנַיִם וְשְׁלִשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהָ:

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(טז) צהר - צי יש אומרים חלון, ויש אומרים אבן טובה המאירה להם:

בראשית פרשת נח פרק ז

(ה) וְהַיָּמִים הָיוּ הַלֹּדֶד וְחִסּוֹר עַד הַחֲדָשׁ הַעֲשִׂירִי בְּעֵשְׂרֵי בָּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ נִרְאוּ רֵאשֵׁי הַקְּרִיָּים: (ו) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נח אֶת חֲלוֹן הַתִּבְּהָ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: (ז) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הָעָרֶב וַיֵּצֵא וַיָּצֹא וְשׁוֹב עַד יְבִשְׁתׁ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: (ח) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה מֵאֵתוֹ לִרְאוֹת הַקָּלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: (ט) וְלֹא מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ לְכַף רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשֶׁב אֵלָיו אֵל הַתִּבְּהָ פִּי מַיִם עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּקְחֶהּ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֵל הַתִּבְּהָ: (י) וַיִּחַל עוֹד לְשַׁבֵּעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּסַּף שְׁלַח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה מִן הַתִּבְּהָ: (יא) וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לֵּצֶת עָרֶב וְהִנֵּה עֹלָה זֹת טָרֶף בְּפִיהָ וַיִּדַּע נח פִּי קָלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: (יב) וַיִּחַל עוֹד לְשַׁבֵּעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה וְלֹא יָסְפָה שׁוֹב אֵלָיו עוֹד: (יג) וַיְהִי בְּאַחַת וָשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בָּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ חֲרָבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּסָּר נח אֶת מִקְסֵה הַתִּבְּהָ וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה חֲרָבוּ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

בראשית פרשת וירא פרק יט

(יז) וַיְהִי כְּהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמַּלְטָה עַל נַפְשֶׁךָ אֵל תִּבְּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֵל תַּעֲמֹד בְּכָל הַכֹּפֵר הַהֲרָה הַמַּלְטָה פֶּן תִּסָּפֵה: (כו) וַתִּבְּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נָצִיב מְלַח: (כז) וַיִּשְׁפֹּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֶּקֶר אֵל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם אֶת פְּנֵי יְקוֹק: (כח) וַיִּשְׁקֶף עַל פְּנֵי סָדֵם וַעֲמֻרָה וְעַל כָּל פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכְּפָר וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹלָה קִיטֵר הָאָרֶץ קִיטֵר הַכְּבָשׂוֹן: