

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Barry and Barbara Bass, "in commemoration of the 70th Yahrzeit of Barry's mother, Dorothy Bass."
- Jeremy and Devorah Gradon, "for a refuah shelaima for Shlomo ben Leah."
- Moshe and Esther Preiser, "in memory of Esther's aunt, Chaya Etel bas Yoav Tzvi, whose yahrzeit is on the 10th of Cheshvan."

Thank you all for your dedication and support of the Shul. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reward you with much *bracha* and *hatzlacha*!

Last week, I ended with a statement from **Rav Yaakov Kaminitzky** in his *Emes L'Yaakov*, that Rabbi Yitzchak (in the famous *Medrash* cited by Rashi) explains why the Torah needs to begin with creation, but *parshios* Lech Lecha and onward is intended to teach us *mentschlichkeit*.

והנה רש"י ריש בראשית הקשה מדוע התחילה התורה מבראשית ברא אלקים היה לו להתחיל מהחדש הזה לכם, ותירץ משום כה מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים כו' הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו וכו'. ולכאורה זה רק מיישב מדוע הביאה התורה את סיפורי מעשי בראשית וכו', אבל כל הפרשיות מלך לך עד פרשת בא, עדיין אינו מובן מדוע הוצרכה התורה להאריך בכל זה, ועל זה לכאורה לא תירץ רש"י כלום. אבל לפמש"כ נראה שבאמת על פרשיות אלו לא קשה כלל, דמהסיפורים האלו אנו למדים מה צריכה להיות הנהגת האדם על פי היושר והדרך ארץ, ודבר זה אפשר לתבוע אפילו מהגויים, כי אף על פי שמצוות לא ניתנו להם, אבל אעפ"כ לחיות על פי יושר זה יכול כל אחד אם הוא רק רוצה בזה. . .

Beyond the specific 613 *mitzvos*, the foundation of Torah is *mentschlichkeit*; decency, honesty and integrity. We can learn *yashrus* from the *avos* and *imahos* and the way they lived. That is why it would have been insufficient to begin with the first *mitzva* in Parshas Bo.

But as I quoted this piece last week, an obvious question came to mind. R' Yaakov writes that Rabbi Yitzchak addressed the need for Parshas Breishis, and R' Yaakov explained the need for Parshios Lech Lecha through Parshas Bo, but his explanation leaves out Parshas Noach.

What is the function of Parshas Noach?

Perhaps the *mabul* and the new world which remained was a new creation of sorts and is, therefore, included in *sippurei maasei Breishis*. But I would like to suggest that parshas Noach teaches the lesson of *mentschlichkeit*, as well. This lesson of the *avos* and *imahos* begins with Noach.

בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק ו פסוק ה - נח פרק ו פסוק ט
(ה) וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-לֵצֶל מַחְשַׁבֹת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע פְּלִי-הַיּוֹם:
(ו) וַיִּגְתָּם ה' כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים:
(ז) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֲמַחֶה אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתָם:
(ח) וַיֵּן מִצָּא הֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'.
(ט) אֲלֵה תוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת-הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְקַלְדָּ-נֹחַ:

The Torah taught that the world had become corrupt—except for Noach. And Hashem decided to destroy the world—except for Noach and his family.

What was his great merit? In addition to being called a *tzadik* and *tamim*, Noach was given another title--*ish*--a *mentsch*.

Rav Mordechai Gifter pointed out that the sequence of the adjectives is *ish*, *tzadik*, *tamim*—to show that before a person can be a *tzadik* or a *tamim*, he must **first** be an *ish*—a *mentsch*, a human being. And to justify one's humanity, one must be honest with themselves, their internal convictions and their innate sense of right and wrong.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach made a similar comment on a statement we make every day in davening לעולם יהא אדם ירא שמים, first one must be a *mentsch*—and then one can become a *y'rei shamayim*.

In a famous comment, **Tosafos** attempts to deal with an apparent contradiction between two statements in the Talmud: The Gemara in Shabbos 31a states that the first question one is asked after he dies concerns honesty in business נשאת ונתת באמונה?, while the Gemara in Kiddushin 40b states that the first judgment one receives concerns commitment to Torah study אין תחילת דינו של אדם אלא על דברי תורה.

Tosafos differentiates between the first question and the first judgment -- the first question concerns honesty, but the first judgment concerns Torah study.

תוספות מסכת קידושין דף מ עמוד ב

אין תחילת דינו של אדם אלא על דברי תורה - והא דאמר בפרק במה מדליקין (שבת לא.) כשמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו נשאת ונתת באמונה היינו דווקא לענין שאלה ששואלין לו על משא ומתן אבל מ"מ נפרעים ממנו תחלה על שלא קבע עתים לתורה.

Why would the first question be different from the first judgment?

I would like to suggest that before G-d judges our actions, He evaluates our character. Before Hashem judges the “what,” He assesses the “who.” What kind of person was involved in Torah study, was it an *ish*, a *mentsch*, a *yashar* person? This is because our character matters as much as our actions.

This highlights the sharp contrast between Noach and the other people of his pre-*mabul* generation. Rashi cites the **Gemara in Sanhedrin (108)**, which tells us

כי מלאה הארץ חמס - לא נחתם גזר דינם אלא על הגזל:

Their fate was sealed because of the sin of stealing. In light of all the Rabbinic literature accusing that generation of the sins that would seem to be more heinous, this fact seems odd.

Why would stealing be so serious as to determine their fate more than anything else they were involved with?

The **Ramban** answers והטעם מפני שהוא מצוה מושכלת. The prohibition against stealing is rational. They were going against their basic intuitive knowledge of right and wrong—in essence, their humanity, their *menstchlichkeit*. We humans are unique in that we can discern between right and wrong, and the *dor hamabul* lacked that basic trait of humanity. How did they ignore something as basic and self-evident as the prohibition against stealing? They lacked basic intellectual honesty, and that was what sealed their fate.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his famous *Shaarei T'shuva*, when describing the severity of dishonesty ונתחייבנו על גדרי האמת, כי הוא מיסודי הנפש.

“... we must be truthful as this is from the foundation of one's essence.”

The starting point of truth is being true to oneself—to one's innate sense of right and wrong. Therefore, for the *dor hamabul* that lacked that basic awareness, there was little hope of rehabilitation.

And that was the greatest challenge to Noach's *mentschlichkeit*. The Torah highlights it—תמים היה—he lived in a wicked generation. And the **Rambam** in De'os 6:1 writes that it is the nature of a human being to be influenced by those around him....

רמב"ם הלכות דעות פרק ו הלכה א

דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחביריו ונהג כמנהג אנשי מדינתו, לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים ולישב אצל החכמים תמיד כדי שילמוד ממעשיהם, ויתרחק מן הרשעים ההולכים בחשך כדי שלא ילמוד ממעשיהם, הוא ששלמה אומר הולך את חכמים יחכם ורועה כסילים ירוע, ואומר אשרי האיש וגו', וכן אם היה במדינה

שמנהגותיה רעים ואין אנשיה הולכים בדרך ישרה ילך למקום שאנשיה צדיקים ונוהגים בדרך טובים, ואם היו כל המדינות שהוא יודעם ושומע שמועתן נוהגים בדרך לא טובה כמו זמנינו, או שאינו יכול ללכת למדינה שמנהגותיה טובים מפני הגייסות או מפני החולי ישב לבדו יחידי כענין שנאמר ישב בדד וידום, ואם היו רעים וחטאים שאין מניחים אותו לישב במדינה אלא אם כן נתערב עמהן ונהג במנהגם הרע **יצא למערות ולחוחים ולמדברות**, ואל ינהיג עצמו בדרך חטאים כענין שנאמר מי יתנני במדבר מלון אורחים.

*It is the nature of man to be influenced in his ideas and conduct by his friends and acquaintances, and to follow the ways of the people of his state. Therefore, it is necessary for man to be in the company of the righteous, and to sit near the wise, in order to learn from their conduct, and to distance himself from the evil-doers who follow the path of darkness, in order not to learn from their conduct; for of such Solomon said: "He that walks with wise men shall be wise; but the companion of fools will be broken by it" (Prov. 13:20); and it is also said: "Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked etc. (Ps. 1.1.). Likewise, if a man be in a state where evil customs prevail and where the people are not following the righteous ways, he should go to a place where the inhabitants are righteous and follow the way of the good. If all the states known to him, or of which intelligence reached him, be followers of a path which is not good, even as it is in our own times, or if he be unable to migrate to a state whose rules of conduct are good, either on account of military operations or on account of sickness, **he should isolate himself and live in seclusion**, even as it is said on the subject: "Let him sit alone and keep silence" (Lam. 3:28). And, if the inhabitants of his state be evildoers and sinners, who deny him the right of residence in the state unless he become assimilated with them, and follows their evil conduct, he should go forth and dwell in caves, or cliffs, or deserts, but not accustom himself in the way of the sinners, even as it is said on the subject: "Oh that I were in the wilderness,¹ See Berakot, 35b. G. in a lodging place of wayfaring men" (Jer. 9.1).*

This is something the Ramcha¹ warns us about in the fifth Perek of **Mesilas Yesharim**, when discussing the obstacles to *zehirus* (translate):

והמפסיד השלישי הוא החברה, דהיינו, חברת הטפשים והחוטאים, והוא מה שהכתוב אומר) **משלי יג**: (ורועה כסילים ירוע. כי הנה אנחנו רואים פעמים רבות אפילו אחר שנתאמת אצל האדם חובת העבודה והזהירות בה, יתרפה ממנה או יעבור על איזה דברים ממנה כדי שלא ילעגו עליו חבריו או כדי להתערב עמהם.

The third detrimental factor is [evil] company, namely, the company of fools and sinners. This is what scriptures says: "he who befriends the fools will be broken" (Prov.13:20). We can see many times, even after the truth of a man's duty for divine service and watchfulness of it has been established by him, he becomes lax in it or transgresses certain commandments so that his friends do not mock him or in order to be able to mingle freely in their company.

והוא מה ששלמה מזהיר ואומר (שם כד): ועם שונים אל תתערב. כי אם יאמר לך אדם) **כתובות יז**: (לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מעורבת עם הבריות, אף אתה אמור לו, במה דברים אמורים, **בבני אדם שעושים מעשי אדם**, אך לא בבני אדם שעושים מעשי בהמה. ושלמה מזהיר עוד) **משלי יד**: (לך מגד לאיש כסיל. ודוד המלך אמר) **תהלים א**: (אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך וגו', וכבר פירשו, זכרונם לברכה) **ע"ז יח**: (אם הלך, סופו לעמוד. ואם עמד, סופו לישב. ואומר) **תהלים כו**: (לא ישבתי עם מתי שוא וגו' שנאתי קהל מרעים וגו'.

This is the intent of Shlomo's warning: "do not mingle with those who make changes" (Prov.24:21). If a man claims to you: "a person's mind should always be associated with his fellow men" (Ketuvot 17a), reply to him, "this refers to human beings who act like human beings. Not human beings who act like animals." Shlomo warns further: "Go from before a foolish man" (Prov. 14:7). And King David said: "Fortunate is the man that walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers" (Ps. 1:1). Our sages expounded this: "If he walks, he will eventually stand. If he stood, he will eventually sit" (Avodah Zara 18b). And "I did not sit with men of falsehood, neither did I go with hypocrites. I have hated the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked" (Ps. 26:4-5).

אין לו לאדם אלא להטהר ולנקות עצמו, ולמנוע רגליו מדרכי ההמון השקועים בהבלי הזמן, וישיב רגליו אל חצרות ה' ואל משכנותיו. הוא שדוד עצמו מסיים ואומר (שם): ארחץ בנקיון כפי ואסובבה את מזבחך ה'.

A man has no [remedy] but to purify and cleanse himself and to refrain his feet from the ways of the masses who are sunken in the vanities of the time and to redirect his feet to the courtyards of G-d and His sanctuaries. This is what David himself concludes: "I will wash my hands in cleanliness and I will go around Your altar, O G-d" (Ps. 26:6).

ואם יארע לו שימצא בחברת מי שילעג עליו, לא ישית לבו אל הלעג ההוא, אדרבא, ילעג על מלעיגיו ויבזם, ויחשוב בדעתו כי לולי היה לו להרויח ממון הרבה, ההיה מניח מה שהיה צריך לזה מפני חבריו שלא ילעגו! כל שכן שלא ירצה לאבד נשמתו מפני לעג.

If he happens to find himself in the company of those who mock him, he should not give heart to this mockery. On the contrary, let him mock them and shame them. Let him consider in his heart - if he had an opportunity to profit a great amount of money, would he leave what he needed to do for this due to other people's mocking him? How much more so, to not want to lose his soul for the sake of sparing himself some mockery.

ועל דרך זה הזהירו ז"ל) אבות ה. כ: (הוי עז כנמר וכו' לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים, ודוד אמר) תהלים קיט: (ואדברה בעדותיך נגד מלכים ולא אבוש.

In this manner the sages of blessed memory warned us: "be brazen as a leopard... to do the will of your Father in Heaven" (Avot 5:20). And David said: "I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46).

Noach's greatness was that he had the strength of character to do what was right, even it meant going against the prevailing wisdom and culture. The challenge of conformity and peer pressure is not new. The first man, Adam harishon, fell prey to this very weakness. The sin of eating of the forbidden fruit of the *eitz hadaas* led the first human couple astray and away from truth. The serpent was the first to think of sinning by eating the fruit. He then convinced Chava to follow his suggestion. When Adam then saw that all the other intelligent creatures had decided upon this course of action, he did not want to be different. Not that he wanted to sin; just that he wanted to conform. And so, Adam, too, ate of the forbidden fruit, and thereby lost sight of the truth.

When Hashem demands that Adam explain his sinful behavior, Adam says that I only wanted to conform--Chava was eating and wanted me to join her.

בראשית פרק ג (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּי הִיא נָתַתָּה לִּי מִן־הָעֵץ וְאָכַל:

He says, "the woman you created gave it to me." She and the snake were doing it, why should I be different?

Centuries after Adam spoke those words, we, modern humanity, the descendants of Adam, are crushed by conformity and we continue to echo those words—with the same feebleness and spinelessness.

Hashem's answer to Adam, as to all people, is sharp, unrelenting, and biting in its sarcasm, as well as in its outright condemnation.

בראשית פרק ג

(יז) וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וְתֹאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אַרְוֶה הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבוּרְךָ בְּעֵצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

Because you have obeyed **the voice of your wife**; You were swayed by empty phrases, peer pressure...

בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) פרשת בראשית פרשה כ

ורבנין אמ' התחילה מיללת עליו בקולה ה"ד ולאדם אמר כי שמעת לקול אשתך לדברי אשתך אין כת' כאן אלא לקול אשתך.

You did not fall prey, Chazal in *Breishis Rabba* emphasize, *l'divrei ishtecha*, but *l'kol ishtecha*, **not to the words of your wife, but to her voice. Foolish Man, cries G-d, your sin was not even an**

intelligent one, it was a silly one. You did not listen to Chava's words, to rational and meaningful persuasion. Rather, you merely followed her voice, blindly debasing yourself by following the pack.

By trying to conform, says G-d, you prove your own foolishness. Conformity, the fear of being different, the desire to do what others do, even at the expense of the Truth, is more than silliness. **It is dangerous.**

Hashem warns Adam: when man conforms אֲתָהּ וְאֶל-עֶפְרָר תָּשׁוּב כִּי-עֶפְרָר For you are dust, and to dust will you return. Man is created from dust, but he has a *neshama* that gives him the potential to rise above his mundaneness. Adam is so called because he comes from the *adama*, the earth. In addition, teaches the **Shelah HaKadosh**, his very name is an expectation and statement of responsibility-- *adameh l'Elyon* [to be similar to be his Creator] But if he just wants to be like everyone else, if he ignores his inner call to find truth--that which makes him unique--he will never be more than *adama* and *afar*, the inanimate dust around him. When you blindly follow the voice of the common crowd, and you are not listening to words of reason and education---you have not exercised your humanity. אֲתָהּ וְאֶל-עֶפְרָר תָּשׁוּב כִּי-עֶפְרָר the curse of conformity.

Adam conformed. And that was the state of man until Noach, and eventually Avraham Avinu who brought this truth to the world.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: *“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”*

And, indeed, Noach was prepared to be different. Demonstrating true *mentschlichkeit*, long before the *avos* and *imahos* would take it to the next level by sharing truth with others and influencing those around them.

Rabbi Jonathan Saks writes: *Only dead fish go with the flow. Live fish swim against the current. So it is with conscience and courage. One reason why Jews have become, out of all proportion to their numbers, leaders in almost every sphere of human endeavor is precisely this willingness to be different. Throughout the centuries, we Jews have been the most striking example of a group that refused to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.*

Noach's ability to deal with so many different challenges came from his *temimus balev*, his intellectual honesty and his allegiance to an innate sense of right and wrong—and his commitment to the path of truth, even when those around him were corrupt.

We currently face many challenges. There is a breakdown of values and ethics all around us. “Group-think” is an unfortunate reality in our culture of social media overload. To survive, we need to be confident of our values and what we stand for. And if we are intellectually honest and stick to our convictions, we can confront every challenge—as difficult and distinct as they may be. But to do this, like Noach, we must have the courage to always “walk with G-d” – and then we can face any challenge.

At this challenging time in our history, may we learn this lesson well. While being active and productive members of the world, we must also insulate ourselves in the *teiva*—of our shul and community—and surround ourselves with good friends, and proper influences. May we fulfill our mission as the Navi Yeshaya says in 42:6 וְאֶתְהַנֵּה לְבְרִית עִם לְאֻר גּוֹיִם: to be a “Covenant people and a light to the Nations,” and may we see the day soon, when Hashem will restore the Beis Hamikdash, bimhera viyamenu, amen.