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Ask HaRav Nebenzahl

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We try our best to accurately present to you the Rav's words. Accuracy can sometimes get lost in the transition from spoken to written word. We would like to thank HaRav Nebenzahl for allowing us to send you this sicha without his first reviewing it. Although it does expedite matters in getting this sicha out to you, it does mean that if there is anything in the sicha that may not be understood, the fault is with us and not with HaRav Nebenzahl.

The Rav asks that his and other Divrei Torah are not read during Tefillah or the Rabbi's sermon.

*Shabbat Shalom,
 Nehemiah Klein*

The Yeshiva would like to express its gratitude to Richard and Anita Grossman for their ongoing support for the Yeshiva in general and specifically our computer center. This enables us to communicate this sicha to you each week - "lehagdil Torah ulehaadira".

Parshat Bereishit is just around the corner. We are proud to announce that the English translation of HaRav Nebenzahl's sichot on Sefer Bereishit is now available through the Yeshiva at a cost of 80 shekels. If you plan to be in the Old City of Yerushalayim please let us know ahead of time and we will have one waiting for you. Otherwise, you may email kleinnd@gmail.com with your name and address and we will send you a copy and instruct you how to make your payment. Total cost including shipping to United States - \$31, to England - \$30.

You may also order any or all of the volumes of the Yerushalayim beMoadeha series - HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl's insights into various periods of the year, written, compiled, and edited by HaRav Chizkiyahu Nebenzahl Shlit"a. The following volumes are currently available (in Hebrew):

Shabbat - I and II

Pesach

Chol HaMoed

Shavuot

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Soon to be published - Shabbat volume III focusing on the 39 melachot

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THE WORLD IS BUILT ON KINDNESS

"THEIR SENTENCE WAS SEALED ON ACCOUNT OF ROBBERY"

In Parshas Bereishis we discussed the fact that one of the pillars on which the world stands is chesed and that chesed is necessary to sustain the world. Yet unfortunately, not long after the creation, we read about the sinful behavior of the generation of the Flood : "Hashem saw that the wickedness of Man was great upon the earth and that every product of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always" (Bereishis 6:5) ... "And the earth had become corrupt before G-d and the earth had become filled with robbery." (ibid. 11)

In response, Hashem decides to destroy the world. Chazal tell us that, despite their licentious behavior and idol worship, "their sentence was sealed only on account of robbery." (Rashi Bereishis 6:13) Is a non-Jew not liable for the death penalty for violating any of the Noachide laws? Furthermore, if we examine our own legal system and compare the punishments for various sins, we will find that the punishment for robbery is far less than for other transgressions: "He shall return the stolen object." (Vayikra 5:23) This does not seem so severe; -a thief must return what he has taken. Perhaps one incurs malkus, the general penalty of lashes administered by Beis Din, for violation of Torah laws in the form of a lav (See Kovetz Shiurim, HaGaon HaRav Elchanan Wasserman zt"l on Baba Basra note 5), but there is certainly no death penalty for robbery. It appears therefore that robbery is a relatively minor offense compared to the many other terrible acts of that generation. Why did robbery seal their judgment?

ROBBERY IS THE ANTITHESIS OF CHESED

It would appear to me that the reason is that Hashem acts with His creatures *מדה כנגד מדה* - "measure for measure." (Shabbos 105b) As long as a person does not steal, there is still room for Hashem's attributes of Rachamim - Mercy and Chesed to intercede and to find something favorable to say about this individual. With other sins, even if from the perspective of justice the person deserves punishment, the Attribute of Chesed works to make Hashem slow to anger and thus the person is not punished so severely. Robbery, however, is the antithesis of chesed. Chesed implies giving something that one has no obligation to give, while robbery has the opposite implication - taking that which is not rightfully yours. Because Hashem acts "measure for measure", when a person steals, the Attribute of Chesed cannot intercede. The judgment of that generation was sealed on account of the robbery that was so widespread that it blocked the intercession of Chesed, and this is what finally brought about the Flood.

NOACH PRESERVED THE WORLD THROUGH KINDNESS

How did Hashem preserve the world despite the decree to destroy it? He took Noach and his family, placed them inside the ark, and gave them the task of spending one full year involved in acts of chesed. "the world is built on kindness." (Tehillim 89:3) Only in this way could they create the world anew. I have always marveled at the incredible acts of chesed Noach and his family performed. That year in the ark must have been exceedingly difficult. The Midrash tells us that for that entire year they did not sleep. (See Tanchuma Parshas Noach, note 9) It is clear why they were unable to sleep. They were running a hotel which employed only eight waiters - Noach, his wife, his three sons, and their wives - to serve thousands of guests! Each guest had his own dietary requirements - this one ate meat, that one's food was dairy, while the third ate only parve. In addition, each guest demanded his meal at a different time. Some ate before Tikkun Chatzos, some after. There were no specific opening hours for the dining room. Food was served twenty-four hours a day! One cannot begin to describe the difficult year Noach and his family experienced in the ark.

It was only recently that I realized an added dimension to their chesed. Not only did they act this way towards thousands of animals - lions, tigers, elephants, and others - twenty-four hours a day, but their chesed extended to human beings too. Which human beings? Was the world not destroyed except for them? They performed acts of chesed towards each other as well. When Noach took upon himself to feed the lion, it meant that his wife did not have to. When his wife decided to feed the tiger, Shem was absolved from such an obligation. Not only did Noach lighten the burden of his wife by feeding the lion, but he spared her bodily harm. We know that Noach was bitten by the lion for arriving late with its food. (See Rashi Bereishis 7:23) If it had been his wife who was late, she would have been hurt. Throughout the time in the ark, in addition to caring for the animals, they performed chesed with each other. "The world is built on kindness." The world had been recreated with chesed as its foundation.

When Noach emerged from the ark, he brought offerings to Hashem. In response to these offerings, Hashem promised never to bring another flood to the world. Noach thus managed to prevent thousands of floods. How many floods did Noach prevent? Every time we see a rainbow in the sky, it is a sign that there should have been a Flood! (There were generations of tzaddikim in which no rainbow ever appeared, for their own merit prevented a flood. See Rashi Kesubos 67b). The offerings Noach brought were but another example of the tremendous chesed that he did for the world.

AVRAHAM VS. NOACH

Noach is introduced to us as a tzaddik: "These were the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d." (Bereishis 6:9-10) Chazal discuss the phrase, "in his generations." Some Sages maintain that the phrase is in praise of Noach. If he was righteous even in his corrupt generation, how much more righteous would he have been if he had lived at the time of Avraham Avinu and been influenced by him. According to others, however, it is critical of him. Only in his generation, compared with the extremely wicked people of his era, was he considered a tzaddik. If he had lived at the time of Avraham Avinu, his righteousness would have been insignificant. Let us see in what way Noach's chesed differed from Avraham's.

Avraham Avinu was known as the pillar of chesed. While Noach performed incredible acts of chesed, Avraham's ways were even greater, as we learn from Chazal. "The Attribute of Chesed said, 'So long as Avraham was in this world, I did not have to perform my job, for Avraham took my place.'" (Sefer HaBahir page 86, note 191) Avraham Avinu was the personification of chesed in this world. Noach sacrificed himself for a whole year by feeding the entire creation, yet he gave them only what they needed - meat or hay, each animal in accordance with its habits. Avraham Avinu not only fed the creations, but he created them himself! What do we mean? He took the poor, downtrodden people who were destined to live a very short life (in this world only) and provided them with eternal life through the Torah that he taught them and the yiras Shamayim that he instilled in them.

The Torah describes Avraham's and Sarah's work as "the souls that they had made in Charan." (Bereishis 12:5) Rashi explains, "For they took them in under the wings of the Divine Presence.

Avraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women, and Scripture considers them as if they made them." (Rashi ibid.) In addition to providing for their physical needs, "He took cream and milk and the calf which he had prepared and placed these before them," (Bereishis 18:8) he taught them to acknowledge the Creator after Nimrod had encouraged idol worship among them and the Name of G-d had been forgotten. The Torah relates that Avraham "planted an eshel in Be'er Sheva, and there he proclaimed the Name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe." (Bereishis 21:33) Rashi offers two interpretations for the word eshel - 'an orchard' or 'an inn for guests.' The letters of the word eshel (aleph, shin, lamed) stand for achila, shtiya, lina - eating, drinking, lodging. "After they ate and drank, Avraham would say to them, 'Bless Him of Whose you have eaten. Do you believe that you have eaten of that which is mine? Of that which belongs to Him Who spoke and brought the universe into being you have eaten.'" Avraham provided his guests not only with physical sustenance but with spirituality and life in the Next World. What greater chesed can one perform with his fellow man? It is for this reason that Avraham is referred to as the pillar of chesed. It may be true that Noach taught Torah too, but he never thought of announcing it to the world, the way Avraham Avinu did.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE CHILDREN OF AVRAHAM

As we mentioned above, the world exists today in the merit of Noach, whose offerings have prevented thousands of floods. Even so, the ancestry of the Jewish people is not traced to Noach, but to Avraham Avinu. The other nations are all referred to as children of Noach; not so the Jewish people. In fact the Mishna tells us that if one were to vow that he would not benefit from Bnei Noach, he would be forbidden to benefit from a gentile, but permitted to benefit from a Jew (see Nedarim 31a). The Gemara goes on to ask, "Do not the Jewish people also descend from Noach?" The Gemara answers "Once Avraham Avinu was singled out by G-d from the rest of humanity and endowed with a special sanctity, Jews are referred to by his name." (ibid.)

It may be through the merit of Noach that the world exists. In fact the first remembrance we mention in Zichronos on Rosh Hashana is "Hashem remembered Noach," (Bereishis 8:1) yet when Avraham Avinu was chosen, the Jewish people ascended to an even higher level. We are descended from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov rather than Noach, because Avraham Avinu spread the message of faith throughout the world. Noach was a believer, yet he kept that belief to himself. If Noach were to be asked whether there was a Creator, he would answer with an emphatic 'Yes!' He would go on to explain that there is certainly justice in this world and there is a Judge. Chazal tell us that Noach spent one hundred and twenty years rebuking his generation. "They would ask him 'Of what use is this (ark) to you?' He would say to them, 'In the future, the Holy One, Blessed is He, is going to bring a flood upon the world.'" (Rashi, Bereishis 6:14) Noach certainly tried hard to rebuke them and to cause them to repent, yet he did not travel from city to city announcing, "There is justice and there is a Judge and there will be a great flood." He stayed at home.

SPREADING THE MESSAGE - TO WHOM?

Avraham, on the other hand went from city to city, kingdom to kingdom trying to spread the idea of belief in Hashem. (See Rambam Hilchos Avoda Zara 1:3) The task of the Jewish people is to follow in Avraham Avinu's footsteps and spread his message of faith. "You are My witnesses - the word of Hashem." (Yeshayahu 43:10) We must announce to the world that there is a Creator. Our actions alone, by following in the path of Avraham Avinu, can spread the word of Hashem. If we are not fortunate and our actions alone do not succeed in spreading the word, we are still witnesses that there is a G-d in this world. The other nations' hatred for us is testimony that we are on Hashem's side. When the entire world, with the exception of those few who can be classified as righteous gentiles, is trying to uproot us, we are still fulfilling, "You are my witnesses - the word of Hashem." Given that a witness may not conceal his testimony, we are obliged to publicize Hashem's uniqueness and not wait until the other nations hate us. They do hate us, but we need not wait to see it. We must stand up and spread the message of faith. Clearly, the place to begin is not with the other nations. We must begin with our own people. There are in fact many Jews today involved in spreading the message of observing the seven Noachide Laws to non-Jews. I am of the opinion that we must begin by spreading the message of Torah to our fellow Jews before we try to change the other nations.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF A JEW

Not everyone has it in him to spread the message successfully to the secular population, but we must involve ourselves to the best of our ability in this pursuit. The very fact that they see us wearing kippot is already a dissemination of faith. I must point out that although removal of the kippah is permitted under certain circumstances such as bathing or having a haircut, one may not do so to give the appearance of a secular Jew. Of course, life-threatening circumstances are an exception. The poskim, for example, permitted those involved in Peilim to dress up in secular clothing in their attempt to save children from missionaries and secular kibbutzim. This can truly be considered as saving lives. Similarly, one working among gentiles may find it dangerous to reveal his faith. In that case he certainly may remove his kippa. In other circumstances, dressing up as a secular Jew is a very serious offense. "You are my witnesses." A Jew's actions must be testimony to his beliefs. Wearing a kippa is not such a great obligation - perhaps it is nothing more than a nice custom. Certainly there are much more serious mitzvos that one can violate. If, however, one removes it with the intention of appearing chiloni, he has committed a terrible sin.

It is well-known that when certain youngsters go to the movies, G-d forbid, they remove their kippot in order not to cause a chillul Hashem. They are mistaken. This is a far greater chillul Hashem. By going to the theater they have perhaps violated one commandment; by removing their kippot they give the appearance of violating all six hundred and thirteen mitzvos! If one can control himself and not go to the theater, that would be the best solution. But to go and then in addition to remove one's kippa is a very serious offense. Wishing to appear as a chiloni, borders on yehareg ve'al yaavor, and is permitted only when the situation is life-threatening. We are all witnesses for Hashem - "All who see them will recognize them, that they are the seed that Hashem has blessed." (Yeshayahu 61:9)

The Rambam writes, (Hilchos Avoda Zara 11:9) "One may not follow the ways of the other nations nor even imitate them ... A Jew should be distinguishable from them and it should be clear from his clothing and other actions, just as he is distinguishable from them in his ideas, and it says: 'And I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine.'" (Vayikra 20:26) It is not only his outlook on life that separates Jew from gentile; his behavior and appearance are indicative of who he is as well. If one wears a particular coat because he is cold, or something light because it is a hot summer day, that is fine. However, donning a specific article of clothing in order to look like the non-Jews is not appropriate. This is why many people wear shtreimels or the like, for today the gentiles do not dress in this manner and we must be distinguishable from the other nations. The Yemenites, in fact refer to the peyos (sideburns) as simanim - 'signs'. The peyos distinguish Jews from others.

We bless Hashem weekly in havdala: "Who distinguishes between sacred and secular, between light and darkness, between Israel and the other nations, between the Seventh Day and the six days of labor."

People who do not understand the difference between sacred and secular, and do not distinguish between the Seventh Day and the six days of labor, do not distinguish between Israel and the other nations either. It is clear that they do not distinguish between light and darkness - they are blind to the world around them. Unfortunately this describes many of today's leaders. We must pray that Hashem replace them with leaders who will lead us to Torah, yiras Shamayim, and the fulfillment of mitzvos.

Rather than giving Jerusalem to the Arabs, may we merit a Jerusalem with the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash speedily in our day. Amen.