

PARASHAT NOACH

This week's shiurim are dedicated by Joseph and Phyllis Eisenman
in honor of Judah L. Eisenman

Creation Anew[1]

By Rav Zeev Weitman

.1The Flood was Intended to Erase the World

The purpose of the Flood, as described at the end of Parashat Bereishit, was to erase life from the face of the earth – in fact, to erase all of Creation:

And God repented of having made mankind upon the earth, and was grieved to His heart. And God said, "I will blot out mankind which I created from upon the face of the earth – both man, and beast, and creeping things, and the birds of the sky, for I repent of having made them." (Bereishit 6:6-7)

God does not bring the Flood with the aim of annihilating the wicked sinners while leaving the righteous at peace in the world. Rather, He regrets and repents of having created man at all. Thus, His decision is that mankind should be erased from the face of the earth – a final and absolute blotting out. The plain meaning of the text indicates that the original plan was to annihilate the human race along with all forms of life from the face of the earth, "for I repent of having made them." Since the entire six days of Creation were meant to prepare the world for the creation of man, the significance of the decision to blot out man is that the world is returned to its state prior to the six days of Creation – a state of void and chaos.

Surprisingly, the text actually asserts that God's initial plan was indeed carried out in full:

And He blotted out all life that was upon the face of the earth – both man and cattle, and creeping things and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth; there remained only Noach and those that were with him in the Ark. (7:23)

If we were to stop reading here, we might conclude that the decision to wipe out mankind completely is perfectly matched by its execution. All of life is wiped out and the world returns to a state remarkably similar to that which existed prior to the six days of Creation, a time of void and chaos. Once again, as in the beginning, the world is covered in water. A precise analysis of God's promise after the Flood – "Summer and winter and day and night will not cease" – led Chazal to conclude that what had in fact ceased during the Flood was not just what God had created on the third, fifth, and sixth days, but also that which had been created on the first day (day and night) and the fourth day (the heavenly luminaries).[2] Since God's work of the second day – the firmament that separated water from water – was certainly wiped out in its entirety by the Flood, we conclude that all the work of the six days of Creation was nullified and the world returned to its state of void and chaos.

All of Creation was blotted out from upon the earth, and even Noah did not remain on the earth, but rather floated in the Ark. Like Chanokh – who, when his time came, was taken up by God – Noah is taken up from the earth. He joins the spirit of God that hovers, as in the beginning, over the face of the water, over the face of the earth which is covered in water, which has returned to its primordial state of void and chaos from prior to the six days of Creation.

When God decides to destroy the world, we are told, "But Noah found favor in God's eyes..." Moreover, when Noah enters the Ark, he takes a male and female of every type of animal. However, neither of these facts necessarily means that God's original plan was to wipe out the sinners while leaving Noah in the world and establishing a new world through him, as indeed ultimately happens.

The fact that Noah finds favor in God's eyes does not cancel out the decision to blot out the world and annihilate it completely. It is possible that the point of having Noah and specimens of all living things enter the Ark was not so that the world could be recreated through them, but rather in order to deliver them from the punishment that had been decreed for the world and all living things. Perhaps Noah is placed in the Ark, which preserves the memory of the world that has been blotted out, so that the Ark can serve Noah as a miniature universe in which he is destined to spend the rest of his life. Thus, human life upon earth could have ultimately come to its end, with the Ark floating upon the water, serving as a monument to the world that was no more.

.2The Decision to Create the World Anew

Seemingly, the objective of the Flood was not achieved. The world was not blotted out, and man continues to stand at its center. Why wasn't the original plan carried out? Why didn't God erase man from the face of the earth?

In light of the above, the fact that we are living in the world and that Noah's Ark was not left floating on the water to this day is not because God did not execute His original plan, but rather because afterwards God decided to create a new world – apparently one that would be different from its predecessor.

It is this new Divine decision to create the world anew that misleads us into thinking that the Flood did not fulfill its original purpose or that God's original intention was to blot out only the sinners, while leaving the world and all of Creation intact and to continue it from Noah.

The decision to create the world anew is hinted at in the similarity that we note between the Creation of the world with Adam and the story of the "creation anew" with Noah, as we shall see below.

The verse, "And God remembered Noah and every living thing and all the beasts that we with him in the Ark" does not necessarily indicate that the original plan had been to continue the world from Noah and his progeny and the animals that were with them. It is possible that their mention here represents a new decision by God, at this point, to create a new world for Noah. Hence, the meaning could parallel the meaning of "remembrance" in the verses, "And God remembered Rachel" or "And God remembered Avraham and He sent Lot forth from amidst the upheaval".

The order of the original Creation was that first there was light and day (1st day), then land (2nd-3rd day), vegetation (3rd day), living creatures (5th-6th days), and man (6th day). Now, again, the world is "created," first with the water gradually subsiding and the tops of the mountains appearing. Thereafter, the raven flies about "until the waters were dried up from off the earth," and the dove brings evidence that vegetation is once again growing. Finally, the animals emerge from the Ark, and man's foot touches the ground of the world that has been prepared for him.[3]

As following the first Creation, so too after the second creation both man and beast are given a blessing to "be fruitful and multiply," and once again man is given dominion over the animal kingdom. Adam was told, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea," while Noah is told, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the sky." The fact that the animals, along with man, are once again blessed to be fruitful and that man is once again given dominion over the animals is perhaps the clearest indication that this is a new creation, not a continuation of the old one. For if this was not so and it is the same world that goes on after the annihilation of the sinners, then what need is there for a new blessing and for a restatement of man's power over all living things?

Man's diet, which had originally included only plants, is now extended to include meat. Corresponding to the original limitation and warning – "from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it," Noah is now commanded, "But flesh with its life, which is its blood, you shall not eat." [4]

.3The Story of Noah's Drunkenness

Is the re-creation of the world more successful than the original Creation? Is the new world better and more refined than its predecessor? Seemingly, the answer is in the negative: man returns to his old ways. His evil inclination, which had brought about God's decision to blot out the world in the first place – "All the impulse of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually" – has remained even after the Flood: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth." [5] Indeed, no sooner does Noah emerge from the Ark than we read of his drunkenness, his uncovering of himself, and the sin of his son. Further on, we read of the sin of the generation that rebels and builds the Tower of Babel. Seemingly, nothing has changed. Man has remained as he was, and continuing in his rebellious ways.

However, it is specifically the story of Noah's drunkenness, which appears at first glance to be nothing more than an appendix to the story of the Flood, that points to the fundamental difference between the original Creation and the creation of the world anew. Immediately after the first Creation is complete, we find that Adam sins. Similarly, Noah sins immediately after the second creation. What we might have perceived at first glance as an external similarity between the first sin (eating of the Tree of Knowledge) and the second (drinking of the fruit of the vine), turns out, upon closer inspection, to shed light on what is different about the second creation.

Noah, the man of the ground who experiences the re-creation of the world, imitates Adam and tries to go back to the Garden of Eden. He plants a vineyard and drinks of its fruits, thereby "repairing," as it were, the original sin of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge in the midst of the Garden. [6] Adam's eating of the fruit of the Tree gave him

knowledge and the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and he hurriedly covers his nakedness. Noach, in contrast, loses his ability to distinguish and is found naked in his tent. The return to the Garden of Eden from before the sin is now complete. Noach appears to have turned the wheels of history backwards, to the days of Adam in the Garden of Eden, prior to his sin.[7]

Cham, who comes upon his naked father, is amazed at the return to the "Garden of Eden" and hurries to tell his brothers the news. However, unlike their brother, Shem and Yefet understand that this return is not progress, but rather a dangerous regression. Shem and Yefet understand that, unlike the previous world, the present world is adapted to a version of mankind that already possesses the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and in this new world man is "created" with his nakedness covered. That which had previously been natural and positive – "And both of them were naked, and they were not ashamed" – now becomes shameful and completely unacceptable. In this new world, there is no place for uncovering nakedness; it must be covered, just as God did immediately after Adam's sin.

Noach, who understands the change, knows what his youngest son has done. He understands that in the new world, sexual immorality is deserving of condemnation, and he curses his son in a manner that is reminiscent of God's curse to Adam – but this time for the opposite act. Adam had brought about the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and the covering of nakedness, while Cham seeks to be rid of the ability to distinguish between good and evil and to expose nakedness. Adam wipes the sweat from his brow in tilling the ground, and Cham will wipe the sweat from his own brow as he labors as a slave of slaves to his brothers. Noach understands that what his youngest son has done should be cursed; there is no place for him in the new world.

Here we discover the change that has taken place between the old world and the new. That which was worthy of being cursed in the original Creation is now deserving of blessing, while that which had been an ideal in the previous world is now cursed. In the original Creation, man was created naked and his dressing in coats of skins following the sin was not sufficient for the "bnei ha-elohim," who sinned with human women, bringing about the blotting out of man from the face of the earth. In Noach's world, man (Noach) is created clothed, such that he understands that gazing upon nakedness in this world is something negative – an act that had previously brought about the Flood – and therefore it must be denounced and eradicated.

.4Noach's Drunkenness and the Drunkenness of Lot

To complete the picture, we must now compare our parasha with the story of Lot and his daughters following the destruction of Sodom. The inhabitants of Sodom, it seems, are descendants of Cana'an:

And Cana'an bore Tzidon, his eldest, and Chet. And the Yevusi and the Emori and the Girgashi, and the Chivi, and the Arki, and the Sini, and the Arvadi, and the Tzemadi, and the Chamati. And thereafter, the families of the Cana'ani were scattered. And the border of the Cana'ani was from Tzidon, as you come to Gerar, until Aza, as you come to Sodom and Amora, and Adma, and Tzevoyim, until Lesha. (10:15-19)

The sons of Canaan follow in the ways of their father: "Bring them [the visiting angels] out to us, that we may know them,"[8] they demand of Lot. Lot's offer of his two daughters in lieu of the guests is not acceptable to them. They prefer sexual immorality that is conducted for its own sake – not for the purpose of procreation, nor even to satisfy their desires. They regard the exposure and viewing of nakedness as an ideal in its own right. God sees that their wickedness is great and their sin grave, and He decides to annihilate them. The entire area is destroyed – the cities, their inhabitants, and even the plants growing in the ground. Fire and brimstone are "rained down" upon the ground (19:24) – a local flood of fire and brimstone, recalling the Flood of water that rained down upon the entire world in the days of Noah. Only Lot and his family are saved, since God has mercy upon him. And like Noah, his ancestor, Lot too becomes inebriated immediately after his deliverance, by drinking wine, and his nakedness is revealed in the cave – once again, in the presence of his offspring.[9]

Lot's daughters are at a level above that of Cham. Unlike Cham, who views incest as an ideal, Lot's daughters have a positive intention in mind: they want to preserve life in the world.

Here we reach the fundamental and central difference between Noah and Lot. Twice the Torah repeats and emphasizes – both after his incestuous relations with his elder daughter and again after his relations with her younger sister – that Lot "did not know when she lay down, nor when she got up" (19:33; 19:35). This is a clear and complete contrast to Noah, concerning whom the Torah states, "And he knew what his younger son had done".

Lot, following his deliverance from Sodom, remains as he had been previously. He was unable to fathom what was required of him in the wake of the events that had taken place before his eyes. He did not see nor did he understand that offering his two daughters to the men of Sodom was evil; likewise, he knows and senses no evil now that he has been exposed before his daughters and has lain with them. Admittedly, this took place while he was asleep and inebriated, but we may assume that the whole episode could not have taken place without his knowing anything of it if the matter had been of critical importance to him and had he recognized how evil this act was in the eyes of God. Proof of this is that Noah, his ancestor, was aware of what his younger son had done to him while he was asleep and inebriated.

Noah was saved from the Flood and understood that a change was necessary from the world as it had been. Lot, on the other hand, escapes the upheaval but remains as he was.[10]

All of Creation is wiped out because of its corruption, and the creation of the world anew is meant to repair the defects of its predecessor. This new creation is adapted to man's dimensions and character after the sin – and man steps into this new world for the first time, clothed. This fact indicates a turning point and progress. He understands that in the new world, sexual immorality is cursed. This represents the hope that this new world will hold old for longer than the previous one.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1]I published this article 33 years ago in Alon Shvut 78 (Kislev 5740) under the same title.

[2]Concerning the verse, "While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease," Rashi writes that the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies ceased throughout the time of the Flood, and there was no distinction between day and night. His words suggest that just as the luminaries did not serve their function of distinguishing between day and night, they similarly did not serve "for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (1:14.)

[3]We may find an allusion to the creation of the second day in the verse, "The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were closed" (8:2), and perhaps even to the creation of the first day in the verse, "In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible" – indicating that there was once again light to illuminate the world.

[4]Perhaps we may point to a further parallel: Upon completing Creation, God expresses His satisfaction: "And God saw all that He had done, and behold, it was very good." Ramban explains that the significance of this satisfaction is His decision to maintain the world forever. Similarly, we see that following the second creation to God's satisfaction, when He smells the sweet savor of the burnt offerings, He makes a decision: "And God said in His heart, I shall not again curse the ground because of man, for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor shall I smite again every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease".

" [5]And God smelled the sweet savor, and God said in His heart: I shall not again curse the ground on account of man, for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor shall I smite again every living thing, as I have done." Previously, the same conclusion concerning man's nature had led to the destruction of the world: "And God saw that man's wickedness was great in the world, and all the inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually. And the Lord repented of having made man upon the earth, and He was grieved to His heart. And God said, I shall blot out mankind, which I created, from upon the face of the earth – both man and beast, and creeping things and the birds of the sky, for I have repented of having made them." It seems difficult to understand how the same evil inclination in man that was the reason for destruction can now be the reason for the opposite decision – that God will no longer strike man. Apparently, the reason for the decision not to curse and strike all life in the world may be traced to the sacrifices that Noach offers and God's smelling of the sweet savor. It seems that the word "ki" in our verse – "I shall not again curse the ground on account of man, for (ki) the impulse...", should be understood in the sense of "although." In other words, God says, "I shall not again curse the ground, even though the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth." An example of this use of the word "ki" can be found in Sefer Shemot (13:17): "And God did not lead them via the land of the Pelishtim for (ki) it was near" –meaning, "although it was near".

[6]The midrashim hint at the parallel between Adam's sin and that of Noach by suggesting, as one opinion, that the Tree of Knowledge was in fact a vine.

[7]Noach's repair of Adam's sin is hinted at the Torah already in the giving of his name: "And he called him Noach, saying, 'This one shall comfort us (yenachamenu) for our work and the toil of our hands because of the ground which God has cursed'".

[8]Cham's nature in this respect is also revealed in the nations which are descended from him, Mitzrayim and Canaan: "You shall not act in the manner of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled; nor shall you act in the manner of the land of Canaan, to which I

bring you, nor shall you follow their practices." This verse (Vayikra 18:3) introduces the unit that lists forbidden sexual unions.

[9]In light of this exact parallel between the story of the Flood and the story of the destruction of Sedom, it would seem that the midrash that Rashi quotes on the verse, "And God shut him in" (7:16) – "He protected him so that they would not break it" – sits well with the plain meaning of the text, since the idea is taken from the story of Lot: God's first act of protection for Lot, before delivering him from the city, was to shield him from the people of his own city, who approached "to break the door." God's angels save Lot: "They pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut the door".

[10] Attention should also be paid to the comparison discussed by Ramban between the story of Lot and the men of Sedom and the story of the concubine at Giv'a (Shoftim 19-21).