

פ' נח תשפ"ד

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WAR

The Ten Commandments are written in the singular, “You (singular) shall not murder” etc. to convey the message that every individual should consider only himself, and not look at his surroundings and conclude that he is basically alright, and much more righteous than others in his environment, who are much worse than him. On the day of judgement, everyone will be asked about their own specific performance of *mitzvos*, and the excuse that others were worse than him, will not be accepted.

As we mentioned last week, we can counter the influence of Yishmoel by using his weapon: prayer. The Rambam (Introduction to *Hilchos Taanis*) rules that during a time of misfortune one has to “shout” to Hashem. This means that not only *Tehilim*, but also all the regular prayers must be recited with deep concentration and devotion. The redemption from Egypt occurred after the Jews’ “cry came up to Hashem” (*Shemos* 2, 23), and in the final redemption too, if we pray by “shouting”, our prayers will ascend heavenwards. At prayer meetings, a shofar should be blown (Rambam *ibid*, and this was the old custom in Yerushalayim during times of misfortunes).

By answering *yehe shme rabbo* “with all one’s might” (Rashi: with concentration) one can overturn evil decrees (*Shabbos* 119 b), and be saved from the birth pangs of *Moshiach* (Vilna Gaon in the introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar*).

In addition to prayer, another way to counter the influence of Yishmoel, who has some merits due to his performance of *bris milo*, is to strengthen our *os bris kodesh*. This entails, for example, watching one’s eyes, and having no more exposure to the (filtered) Internet than is absolutely necessary for making a living.

In a time of war, Torah is our real weapon. Yehoshua in wartime learnt “the depth of *halocho*” (*Megilla* 3b), and we too should make sure to learn *sugyos* in depth. To be saved from the birth pangs of *Moshiach* one must become busy (*ya’asok*) in Torah and lovingkindness (*Sanhedrin* 98b). This means, explains the Chofetz Chaim, that we have to make Torah and lovingkindness our business (*esek*), and constantly think of ways of improving ourselves in these areas. We have to be especially careful not to waste time, and to make the most of our Fridays, *leil Shabbos*, *Shabbos* and *Motzoei Shabbos*, adding as many hours of learning as possible.

Rav Sternbuch heard from the late Rav Yaakov Landa who heard from the Gerer Rebbe, the Imrei Emess, that the reason that almost all the Sefardim were spared the ravages of the Holocaust is because they are very particular about maintaining the sanctity of *botei kenesityos*, and do not talk about secular matters there. Therefore, they were saved from evil decrees. We too should focus on maintaining the sanctity of our *shuls*, so that our prayers may ascend heavenwards and protect us.

Last *Shabbos* there was public transportation in most places in *Eretz Yisroel*, supposedly for “war purposes”. *Shabbos* was trampled upon and treated like any other day. This has to be protested. Particularly during a time of war we need extra divine protection. As the Chazon Ish said: “They are afraid of bombs, but I am afraid mainly of *Shabbos* desecrations, which cause the bombs”. Therefore, we must protest these acts, and in the merit of protesting the sanctity of *Shabbos*, we will merit divine protection.

HOW TO BE SAVED FROM THE BIRTH PANGS OF MOSHIACH – USING THE TEIVO AS A REFUGE

“You shall make the ark with compartments (*kinim*)” (6:14)

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin said that if one wants to be saved from the birth pangs of *Moshiach* one has to disconnect completely from the way of life, mentality, and outlook of non-Jews or those erring Jews who live a non-Jewish way of life. This can only be achieved by constructing a *teivas Noach*.

The *medrash (Bereishis Rabbo 38:14)* says that in the above *possuk* Hashem was telling Noach that just as a bird offering (*ken*) purifies the *metzora*, so too will the *teivo* purify you. A *metzora* is punished for speaking *loshon horo*. He wanted to show off to people how smart and knowledgeable he is, and so he is punished by being forced to live in isolation from his fellow man, until he becomes used to not speaking at all. Similarly, Hashem wanted to demonstrate to Noach that when one is surrounded by wicked people, the solution is to live in isolation from them. The *teivo* serves as a reminder for Noach's descendants in future generations when faced with similar situations to imagine that they are living on their own, and not be influenced by their environment.

The *medrash (ibid, 39:6)* says that even though Hashem made a covenant not to bring another flood to the world, that refers to a flood of water but not to a "flood" of fire. Our generation is engulfed in an inferno of heresy and immorality, which is constantly increasing, and in order to be saved from this conflagration we have to follow in the footsteps of Noach by separating ourselves completely from the people in the street, since their speech and notions are very far removed from Hashem's world. Someone fortunate enough to spend the entire day in a yeshiva or *kollel* is privileged to live in Hashem's world even in *olom hazeh*.

The late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, once met the Chazon Ish and told him that in view of the *Rambam* that states that if a person finds himself in an environment full of wicked people he must run away and live in the desert (*Hilchos Dei'os 6:1*), since the streets in our times are full of *kefirah* (heresy) we should follow the *Rambam's* advice. The Chazon Ish responded that there was no need to do that since the yeshivos and *kollelim*, which are full of Torah and fear of Heaven, are our "deserts." They serve as a type of *teivas Noach*, separating the Torah world from the world outside, so that we can remain impervious to the pernicious atmosphere prevailing there.

MERITING CHILDREN

"Noach walked with G-d... And Noach begot three sons: Shem, Chom, and Yefess" (6:9-10)

The Seforno expounds as follows: *Noach walked with G-d*: Noach walked with G-d by following the ways of Hashem by rebuking the members of his generation and urging them to follow the proper path, therefore, *Noach begot three sons*: when he started reproving his fellow men he merited having sons.

Hashem acted towards Noach measure for measure: by bringing back His erring sons to their Father in Heaven, he was repaid by having sons of his own.

A wonderful *segula* for childless couples is to engage in outreach activities and bringing back Hashem's children to the fold. This can be done physically or financially. Our generation, in particular, when so many people are far removed from Torah, is an especially auspicious time for this. Whoever takes part in these holy activities can arouse Divine mercy, and merit having children, measure for measure.

BEMOANING IMMORALITY

"And the earth was corrupt before G-d" (6:11)

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky deduced from this *possuk* that only Hashem realized how corrupt the Earth had become, whereas the people did not. He noted that in the generation of the *mabul* people had become so depraved that they did not notice the state of the Earth, assuming that the world had been created to look like that. That was a sign that the *tumah* had become so much entrenched into their very being that their only rectification was to be obliterated.

In our generation all the boundaries of immorality are being breached, and even if we are unable to prevent this process, we should at least contemplate the extent to which the world has become corrupted, bemoan this situation, and not become desensitized to it.

AD MEA VE'ESRIM

“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood” (6:14). Rashi: *Many ways to bring relief and rescue are available to Him; why, then, did He burden him with this construction? In order that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred and twenty years and ask him, “Why do you need this?” And he would say to them, “Hashem is destined to bring a flood upon the world.” Perhaps they would repent.*

This *medrash* quoted by Rashi is based on the *possuk*, “And his days shall be a hundred and twenty years”, on which Rashi comments: “Until a hundred and twenty years I will delay My wrath towards them, but if they do not repent, I will bring a flood upon them”. In other words, Hashem waited 120 years for the Generation of the Flood, and provided them with Noach to warn them and give them a chance to repent.

It is customary to wish one another to live for 120 years, on the basis of the *possuk*, “And his days shall be a hundred and twenty years”. However, this custom is based on a misconception, because this *possuk* is not talking about man’s life expectancy, but rather about the amount of time Hashem was willing to wait for the Generation of the Flood to repent, as is evident from the above quotations. On the other hand, the fact that Moshe lived for 120 years may be cited as a justification for the customary wish.

It is said that Rav Chaim Brisker said that there is no source in the Torah that a person’s life expectancy is limited to 120 years, and he was therefore opposed to the “*ad mea ve’esrim*” wish on the grounds that it might actually be a curse not to live longer. After all, Rabi Yochanon lived for 400 years, and other *amoro'im* also lived more than 120 years. Moreover, the Rambam writes (in his Mishna commentary on Sanhedrin Ch. 10) that in the times of *moshiach* people will live longer due to the absence of worries and troubles, so at least during that time people will surely live for more than 120 years.

It would therefore appear that people should not be wishing each other “*ad mea ve’esrim*”, but rather a general wish for a long life (*arichus yomim*).

WINDOW OR PRECIOUS STONE

“You shall make a skylight for the ark” (6:16) Rashi: *Some say that it was a window, and some say it was a precious stone, which gave them light*

It may be suggested that these two opinions revolve around the question as to how to relate to an environment of wicked people. Those who hold that the *tzohar* was a window argue that by considering the evil deeds of the wicked and their downfall, one will be inspired not to follow their ways. Hence, the window for witnessing the wicked and their downfall outside.

On the other hand, those who hold that it was a precious stone believe that the main thing to be done in a generation of wicked people is to increase light inside our houses. The light of Torah and *mitzvos* brings life to those who practice them. According to this opinion, the precious stone alludes to the Torah and *mitzvos* which illuminate dark times.

VILNA GAON REFUSES TO HEAR CRITICISM OF CHASSIDIM

“Of the clean beasts and of the beasts that are not clean” (7:8)

The *gemoro* (*Pesochim* 3b) derives from the fact that the Torah went out of its way to say “not clean”, instead of “unclean” that one must use clean language, and not utter indecent words.

The Chazon Ish once overheard someone calling his friend a liar, and told that person to be more euphemistic and tell his friend, “You are not telling the truth”.

It is related about the Vilna Gaon that someone told him about what the *chassidim* were doing. The Gaon became upset with that person, telling him that it was *loshon horo* which it was forbidden to hear. Those present expressed their surprise, pointing out that on several occasions people had told him similar things, and then he had not protested. The Gaon explained that, on the one hand, in the above *possuk* the Torah went out of its way to use a roundabout phrase in order not to state expressly “unclean”, whereas in *parashas Shmini* (*Vayikro* 11:8) it says, “They are impure for you”, and does not use a roundabout phrase. This is because in *parashas Shmini* the Torah had a specific reason for speaking directly, since it wanted to denigrate eating *tome* things, but in our *parasha* the *possuk* is only relating facts, and not telling us *halochos*. In such a case, it is more appropriate to use the euphemistic “not clean”.

The Vilna Gaon thereby intended to convey the point that there was currently no purpose in hearing the things which this person wanted to tell him, so that it was not permitted to hear words denigrating others.

THE POWER OF REPENTANCE

“And the rain was upon the earth for forty days and forty nights” (7:12). Rashi: *He brought them down with mercy, so that if they would repent, they would be rains of blessing*

Noach’s contemporaries committed all the cardinal sins, and (unlike the generation that built the *migdal Bavel*) even their character traits were totally corrupt, and yet Hashem still waited 120 years to see if they would repent. Had they done so, they would have been forgiven, and the rains would also have turned into rains of blessing, even though the repentance would only have been motivated by fear of an impending deluge. How much more so is the power of *teshuva me’ahavo*, when a person repents out of love of Hashem, and a desire to fulfil His will. When that happens Hashem showers him with unlimited blessings.

SUFFERING

“Only Noach survived” (7:23). Rashi: *He was groaning and spitting blood because of the burden of caring for the cattle and the beasts, and some say that he delayed feeding the lion, and it struck him, and concerning him it is said “Behold a righteous man is requited [for his sins] in this world.”*

Even small amounts of suffering in this world can eradicate much suffering in the eternal world. For this reason, many *tzaddikim* request suffering in this world in order to atone for their sins and to be spared from punishment in the afterlife.

Rav Sternbuch was with Rav Mordechai Pogromansky two weeks before he passed away. At the time, Rav Pogromansky was suffering from cancer and already blind. When the doctors wanted to administer morphine to alleviate his suffering, he refused, and could be heard whispering to himself an awe-inspiring prayer to Hashem: “Master of the Universe, I have sinned before You and have to endure suffering in order to become purified. I ask You to give me as much *yissurim* as I deserve, but please inflict all the suffering here in this world so that I can enter the afterlife in a completely pure state without sin, and do not leave me any debts for the afterlife.” The doctors were completely amazed as to how a person can endure such suffering willingly. (Rav Pogromansky also refused to be treated by female nurses since he had always been careful not to look at women.)

RAV HUTNER AND THE SATMAR REBBE

“And only Noah... survived” (7:23)

The late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel, once spoke against the State of Israel, the Zionists and their accomplices at a meeting of *rabbonim* and *admorim* in America. One of the *rabbonim* got up and protested this speech, using disparaging language against the Rebbe. Rav Yitzchak Hutner was also present at that meeting, and he cited the above Rashi. He asked why Noach deserved such a

punishment for being late once, when he had dedicated so much of his time to the welfare of all the animals. He answered that since there was only one lion left in the whole world, so that the continued existence of the entire species was dependent on that lion, Noach's responsibility was very great, and he should have been especially careful not to breach his obligations by being late in feeding it. Similarly, concluded Rav Hutner, the Satmar Rebbe is one of the lions of the generation, one of the remnants the great pre-War generation whom Hashem has bestowed on this orphaned generation to save us, and the world's continued existence according to Hashem's Will depends on him. Hence, whoever offends him exposes himself to severe punishment.

40-DAY SEGULAH

"And it came to pass at the end of forty days" (8:6)

The number forty is of great significance. For example, as this *possuk* notes, the *Mabul* lasted forty days. Also, continuous prayer for a forty-day period for the sake of a specific purpose is a wonderful *segulah*: someone in need of a *yeshuah* such as those suffering from *parnosso*, *shidduch* or health problems, should go to *shul* on a daily basis especially for the sake of the prayer, state what they are asking for, give money to charity, even a small amount, and afterwards recite one of the five "books" of *Tehillim* (*Tehillim* is divided into five such "books"), and undertake *bli neder* that if Hashem will answer their prayers, they will say the *Nishmas* prayer each day for a forty-day period.

[On Shabbos when it is not possible to give *zedoko*, one should at least undertake to give a small amount after Shabbos, and although it is forbidden to pray expressly for one's material needs on Shabbos, one may pray in general that Hashem should fulfil all his needs, including *parnosso*].

Several men and women have told Rav Sternbuch that they had their prayers answered in this way.

One must not lose sight of the fact, however, that the basis of all *segulos* is trust in Hashem, and that He will help. Moreover, *dinim* (judgments) should be distinguished from *gezeiros* (decrees). *Dinim* can be overturned through prayer, *segulos*, and repentance, whereas *gezeiros* are much more difficult to overturn — this can only happen on occasions such as Yom Kippur or when one prays with tears throughout the year. We also have a tradition that if someone undertakes to pray the *Yom Kippur Koton* prayer every month and engages in a dialogue with the Creator from the depths of his heart, with tears, to the best of their ability, that is also effective for overturning *gezeiros*.

VEGETARIANISM

"Every moving thing that lives shall be yours to eat; like the green vegetation, I have given you everything" (9:3). Rashi: *For I did not permit Odom to eat meat, but only vegetation, but for you, just as the green vegetation' which I permitted for the first man, I have given you everything.*

Odom was not permitted to eat meat because before the generation of the *mabul* the essence and fate of animals were closely connected to man. When man became immoral they also interbred. Since they were closely connected to man they were on a high level, and man was therefore forbidden to kill them in order to eat them for his enjoyment. After the *mabul*, their level descended, so that their own behavior was no longer connected to that of man, and their purpose was now only to serve man. Hence, it became permitted to eat them.

If someone is vegetarian for health reasons that is permitted, but if he refrains from eating meat for ideological reasons, namely because he believes it to be cruel to kill animals for food, he is thereby denying that man is the pinnacle of Creation. Such people must be suspected of being animalistic, being unable to determine man's superiority over animals. If all people would be as corrupt as they are, there would indeed be no justification for man to kill animals for food.

In reality, the whole of Creation was created to serve man, and it is not cruel or demeaning for an animal to be slaughtered for food. On the contrary, the Ramban (in *Iggeres Hakodesh* Ch. 3) explains at length how *shechting* and animal is a merciful act for the benefit of the animal, which

becomes elevated by becoming part of the man's body, especially since the *shochet* makes a blessing on the *shechita* and we make a *brocho* before eating the meat, which is an additional *tikkun* (elevation or rectification) for the animal.

NO SUB-TITLES

"And Noach began to be a master of the soil, and he planted a vineyard" (9:20).

The *medrash* (*B. Rabbo* 36:3) says that Moshe is more beloved than Noach. Noach was called "master of the soil" after being called righteous, in contrast to Moshe who was called an "Egyptian man" initially, but subsequently only a "man of G-d".

Although he was indeed righteous, Noach attached importance to his agricultural activities, and therefore deserved the title "master of the soil", whereas Moshe was initially an "Egyptian man" but as soon as he became close to Hashem he was known only as a "man of G-d", because he did not attach importance to anything other than cleaving to Hashem.

In Germany rabbis used to only be respected if they had a university degree, and today some parents insist that their sons obtain a degree or learn a profession, but the truth is that the only thing of value is Torah: "Delve in it for everything is contained therein" (*Ovos* 5:22).

NO NEED FOR ALCOHOL

"And Noach began to be a master of the soil, and he planted a vineyard" (9:20). Rashi: *"He made himself profane" for he should have first engaged in planting something different.*

Why is Noach held to task for planting a vineyard promptly, instead of other trees?

On the plain level, this may be because a "vineyard" consists of five trees (*Kilayim* 4:7), and Noach should have minimized his investment in this world by initially planting only one tree, instead of immersing himself straightaway in planting a whole vineyard.

Alternatively, Rav Yisroel Moshe Dushinsky, the late *Ga'avad* of the *Eida Hachareidis*, suggested the following explanation. People who consume alcohol are usually despondent or depressed, seeking a way out of their misery. For this reason, *bnei Torah* who cleave to Hashem and His Torah, feel no need to drink wine, because their life is already filled with joy and satisfaction.

Accordingly, Noach is criticized because even though he saw the desolation of the world when he came out of the Ark, and the sight of this destruction must have upset him terribly, he should still have not felt the need to drink wine to improve his state of mind, but should rather have made himself happy by cleaving to Hashem, thus making the need to consume wine superfluous. This is what *Chazal* meant that Noach "made himself profane", because if he would have led a holy life dedicated to Hashem, he would not have needed any wine to make himself happy.

SPLENDID ISOLATION

"From that land emerged Ashur, and he built Ninveh and Rechovos Ir and Kolach" (10:11). Rashi: *Since Ashur saw his sons obeying Nimrod and rebelling against the Almighty by building the tower, he departed from their midst*

The Chofetz Chaim said that this episode teaches us that someone who distances himself from the wicked enjoys success, because when Ashur left Babylon in order to keep his distance from Nimrod, it must have appeared to involve great suffering and self-sacrifice on his part, being forced to wander from place to place. However, in reality it transpired that Ashur only enjoyed success and profited from his action, because after leaving this country he constructed Ninveh, a great city, as well as several other cities. Every father or teacher should educate his sons and students to be proud of the privilege of being *bnei Torah*, rejoice in having been chosen from amongst the nations, and separate ourselves completely from our erring brethren. Instead of trying to fawn to them or appease them, we should take pride in being soldiers in Hashem's army, and internalize the fact that through our Torah learning we prevent many misfortunes and wars.