



KOLOT HAMIZRACH

Special Edition in honour of Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Noach 5777 ▪ November 2016



Empowering Leadership

Rabbi Elan Mazer
National Director, Mizrachi Canada

It is with immense honour and humility that Mizrachi Canada welcomes Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

Over the past week we have spoken to the communities and students of Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa; held instrumental meetings with the Vaad HaRabanim and community leaders in each city; and met with some of Canada's elected officials.

As we welcome the Chief Rabbi on this momentous Shabbat, I believe that it is fitting to examine the role of leadership in our time. We live in a generation when people feel a very strong sense of self, and independence and individualism are two of the most cherished values to our society. Autonomy is so important to us that often the term "follower" has a negative connotation. In a culture where followers are looked down upon, what then is the role of a leader?

The beginning of Sefer Bereishit describes different types of leaderships, and we will begin our analysis there.

The main character in our parsha is

Noach, and the words that the Torah uses to introduce him places him under immediate scrutiny by all the mefarshim: "Noach was righteous and upright in his generation". Why did the Torah feel the need to emphasize "in his generation"? The Gemara (Sanhedrin 108) brings a famous argument between critics discussing whether Noach would have also been considered "great" in a future or different generation, or whether he would not have been considered anyone important at all. An argument of this nature can never be settled. My students can argue for hours on end whether or not Jordan or Gretzky would have been as great – or greater – today, and historians often deliberate over how world leaders may have acted in situations that took place much later.

These intellectual debates raise many important and educational points, however the simplest answer has no less to offer. With the additional emphasis on Noach's generation, the Torah is telling

us that not only would Noach's personality not have been right for later generations, but for his generation Noach was the ideal Tzaddik! After mankind disobeyed the word of God and ate from Eitz HaDa'at, Hashem took a step back and left humanity to their own devices. Society took morality into their own hands by deciding for themselves what is right and what is wrong, but disregarding all authority ultimately plunged the world into the depths of immorality. Noach, on the other hand, was the polar opposite of the society he lived in: while everyone around him acted defiantly and independently, "Noach walked with God".

Throughout the story of the flood, Noach is the most obedient of servants. He does not talk throughout the entire story, he only acts on the words of God. Every step of the way Noach does exactly what God asks, and doesn't make a move without first receiving a command. It is only after the flood subsides that Noach starts acting of his own volition.►



► This stance of obedience was the exact counter-culture that was needed, and while Noach could not save the people of his time, he did save the world.

Ten generations later, and at the end of this week's parsha, we are introduced to Avraham Avinu. We meet him as he leaves the land of his birth and goes towards Eretz Yisrael, which Hashem only instructs him to do after he has already started. The Torah describes how Avraham is told to "walk before [God]."

The Ramban asks a famous question: while the Torah tells us that Hashem reached out to Avraham and told him to go to the land that He shall show him (even though Avraham was already on his way) the Torah never explains why God chose Avraham as the recipient of this command. The Sfot Emet gives an explanation that changes our way of thinking about Avraham's being the "chosen one". In his book, he explains that God did not choose Avraham specifically, but rather every day, at every moment, Hashem is calling out "Lech Lecha; Go for yourself" – and Avraham was the first to listen. What made Avraham special was not

his obedience, he did not wait for a Godly command to follow. Avraham looked out in the world and decided what was needed and he acted. He did not merely accept what he saw, but rather challenged


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Avraham's leadership was not about what "I should do" (following orders), rather "I shall do what is needed" (searching out what needs to be done).

The beginning of the Torah offers two paradigms of leadership—the obedient Noach, and the proactive Avraham—and each one has its place in history. Today, there is an additional level of leadership

required: the leadership of empowerment. Often I speak to my students about the importance of a "purpose based Judaism", to see the Torah not only as a book of rules that must be followed, but rather as a system that empowers us to change the world. Whenever I say that every creation of Hashem has a purpose, the most common retort is "how am I supposed to know my purpose?"

The answer, of course, changes. Your purpose will depend on your personality, your strengths and qualities, as well as the environment in which you find yourself. In Noach's time obedience was required to fulfill his purpose, while in Avraham's time his purpose was revealed when he was proactive. There is much to learn from both leaders, but ultimately we look at Avraham as our forefather, not Noach, and today we take Avraham's leadership one step further: not only going out and observing what needs to be done, but empowering others to be leaders as well, working together to fulfill our ultimate destiny. Our purpose is right in front of us, and will be revealed when we go forth and change the reality around us. 

KOLOT HAMIZRACH

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Chief Rabbi's Office



Our “generations” are not only our descendants

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

The commencement of this week’s Sidra does not appear to make much sense. We open with the words, “These are the generations of Noach.” After other similar openings in the Torah, the names of descendants follow immediately. But not here. Instead, the Torah goes on to tell us, “Noach was a righteous man, he was perfect in his generations. Noach walked with Hashem”. Only after that, the narrative continues on from the opening statement about subsequent generations: “And Noach begot three sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet”.

As can be expected, Rashi shares our dilemma and he gives two possible explanations. The first is “Zecher Tzaddik Livracha” – when we mention the name of a righteous person, we extol the virtues of his or her character. As such, the praises of Noach are given in parenthesis here, between details of his generations.

One of the rules of Rashi’s commentary on the Torah is that he leaves his preferred explanation for last and it is easy to understand why he provides an alternative commentary here. While it makes sense for the praises of Noach to follow the mentioning of his name, the Torah, however, does not do this for other great Biblical characters.

In his second explanation, Rashi indicates that the term “toldot” – generations, can also refer to “good deeds” that one has performed. The lesson is abundantly clear: In the same way that one can give birth to physical generations, so, too, through our deeds, one can make an indelible mark on the lives of others which, in turn, will be transmitted through to the generations to

come.

Not all people have the good fortune to raise families. Nonetheless, it is within the grasp of every single one of us to have “generations” through the hearts

we touch and the minds we mould. As a result, not only are we the physical descendants of Noach today, but we are also the heirs to his legacy of good deeds, which will live on forever. 🌟

Office of The CHIEF RABBI

About the Chief Rabbi

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis is only the 11th Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth since the office was introduced in 1704. Chief Rabbi Mirvis succeeds Lord Sacks. Born in 1956 into a Rabbinical family in South Africa, Chief Rabbi Mirvis studied at Herzlia High School, Cape Town (1968 – 73), Yeshivat Kerem BeYavne (1973 – 76) and Yeshivat Har Etzion (1976 – 78). He received his Rabbinic ordination from Machon Ariel, Jerusalem (1978 – 80) and gained a BA in Education and Classical Hebrew from the University of South Africa. He also received certification from the Yaacov Herzog Teachers College as a high school teacher in Israel.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis has held educational and community positions in Israel, Ireland and the UK. His first position was Rabbi of the Dublin Hebrew Congregation (1982 – 84). He was the Chief Rabbi of Ireland (1984 – 92), a position previously held by Lord Jakobovits, and Rabbi of the Western Marble Arch Synagogue in London (1992 – 96), a position previously held by Lord Sacks. Chief Rabbi Mirvis was appointed Senior Rabbi at Finchley United Synagogue (known as Kinloss) in 1996, a position which he held until becoming Chief Rabbi in 2013.

His wife, Valerie, is a local authority senior social worker who has carried out Frontline Child Protection for many years and now works in adoption. Chief Rabbi and Mrs Mirvis’s eldest child, Liora Graham, passed away in 2011, following a long battle with cancer. They have four sons, Hillel, Daniel, Noam and Eitan, a son-in-law, Jonathan, two daughters-in-law, Melanie and Althea, and seven grandchildren.



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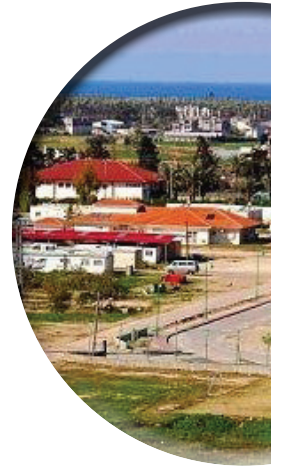
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The responsibility to inspire



We each have the potential to both shine our light on others around us, and to reveal God's light to others, and with this potential comes immense responsibility.

By Leora Mayer

In the beginning of this week's parsha, God tells Noah of His plans to destroy the earth, and commands him to construct an ark: "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood..." (6:14). Noah listens to God's command and begins to build an ark. Rashi teaches us that Noah worked on the ark for 120 years, "so that the people of the generation of the Flood should see him busy with the ark for 120 years and might ask him, "What use is this to you"? and so he might answer them, "In the future the Holy One, is going to bring a flood upon the world" – thus, through the construction of the ark, they might repent". Noah understood that building the ark was not only to reach an end goal, rather the process of building of the ark was independently significant. This teaches us an important message, that the correct attitude to approaching mitzvot is to find happiness and meaning in the actual performance of the deed itself and not only with the end result.

Yet, Noah did not succeed in helping his generation repent. The Gemara in Sanhedrin tells us that the state of the world at the time of Noah was one immersed in violence, fraud, deceit, jealousy and greed. The world was on an extremely low level, but "Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations". In Judaism we have an emphasis on being a positive influence unto the world, and helping all people reach their true potential. Noah may have been a "righteous man" in a generation that was extremely corrupt and lowly, but the true test is not to merely withstand difficult environments and remain righteous, but to impact and elevate others from their lowly state as well.

When God gives Noah the instructions to build the ark, He specifies, "A window (tzohar) shall you make for the ark". Why


specify of all things must the ark have a window? Why is the word tzohar used? Tzohar means "something that shines". Some mefarshim translate this as a skylight on the ark, while others explain Tzohar as some sort of precious stone that emits light. A window brings external light. By commanding Noah to build an ark with a window, God is showing Noah that it is his responsibility to reveal Hashem's light into the world. It is Noah's job to bring Hashem's light into a time of darkness. However, if we go with the opinion stating a tzohar is a precious stone that emits light, we learn another valuable message. Not only do we have to bring Hashem's light out of the concealment into this world, but we need to shine our light that already exists from within ourselves, like the light existing in this precious stone. We each have the potential to both shine our light on others around us, and to reveal God's light to others, and with this potential comes immense responsibility.

The Meshech Chochma raises an insightful question. In the first pasuk of our parsha, Noah is called a "righteous man", but at the end of our parsha Noah engages in inappropriate behaviour and is downgraded to be called a "man of the earth". In contrast, Moshe Rabbeinu is referred to as an "Egyptian man" in the beginning of parshat Shemot, and at the end of his life in parshat Vezot Habracha he is called "the man of God". Moshe seems to be elevated in his names, and Noah seems to take a tremendous fall. What did they each do or not do which led to these opposite results?

The Meshech Chochma answers by saying that there are two different paths in serving God. You can be someone who is righteous, yet lock yourself in a room and focus only on personal pursuits of spirituality. Or, you can be someone who sacrifices his own personal time to help the

community around him. This latter personality views the needs of others as his own. Noah lived in a generation of sinners, yet he did not make any active attempts to positively impact them or rebuke them. Building the ark for 120 years could cause some sinners to question Noah's acts, but the proper mindset is not to build and sit around and wait for opportunities to present themselves to you. It is our job to go out and grab opportunities for ourselves. Contrasting this behaviour of Noah, we have Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe began his life in Pharaoh's palace on a spiritual low, but he stood up for his people at the risk of himself. He gave up personal pursuits, a life in the palace, wealth and power, to stand up for his people. This is when someone is truly meriting the name "man of God". God gives the people who dedicate their lives to the community at large a higher spiritual crediting.

In Sefer Yeshayahu the flood is referred to as "the waters of Noah", seemingly holding Noah responsible for the entire flood and destruction of the world. Noah may have been righteous but he failed to step outside of his personal pursuits, and actively impact the community around him. It is not enough to elevate yourself spiritually, we all carry the tremendous responsibility to help others around us: "Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh", all of Israel are responsible for one another.

May we all merit to not only be elevated spiritually, but to shine God's light and positively impact our own communities and the world at large. 

Leora Mayer is a graduate of Ulpanat Orot, and currently studies at Stern College in New York. This Dvar Torah is dedicated in memory of her Grandpa Gene, Dr. Eugene Jurkowitz, whose Yahrtzeit is on the fifth of Cheshvan. May his neshama have an Aliyah.



Rav Kook: The colourful refinement of light

עין איה, ברכות חלק ב – From Ein Aya on Brachot, part 2

The flood came to the world as a result of the moral collapse [of society], this evil expressed itself mainly as deeds.

Immoral acts are bound to occur if the proper precautions are not set in place.

As long as clear and pure intellectual ideals are not translated into upright human actions, or purity of emotions, there is no safe standing for man's inclination to keep its balance. Reason for destroying the earth once again would not be far off.

When man was created, in all his strength and might, it may have [theoretically] been enough to solely use pure intellect to guide him towards the proper path.

It might have been possible for a man of great inner strength, with the pursuit of truth alone, without clothing it with emotional or moral concern, to live an honest lifestyle.

It would seem that this was the approach of man before the flood, in all their physical and spiritual might.

However when they perverted their ways, there was a need to create a system that connects lofty intellectual truths with a permanent honest way of life.

Therefore there was a need for the covenant of the rainbow, to shine the light through the clouds – “for the rainbow was seen in the clouds as a sign of the covenant.”

Humans tend to believe that as long as our minds are “in the right place,” and we strive to be honest and upright, then we will become good people. Throughout history, many great thinkers have put forth various ethical systems that describe the philosophical ideal of human potential, however seldom do we see societies that actually succeed in realizing these ideals.

Between the sin of Adam in Gan Eden and the story of Noah and the flood, there were no set rules in the world; God did not command anything of humankind. Left to their own devices, humanity then fell to the pits of immorality. After

המבול היה על הארץ לרגלי ההתמוטטות המוסרית ביותר רעה, ועיקר הרעה היא הרעה המעשית.

הרעה המעשית היא נכונה להתפרץ תמיד, אם לא תהיה לה הגנה נאותה,

כל זמן שיהיו מושגי השכל הטהור בלתי מיוחסים כלל אל ההישרה המעשית האנושית וטהרת רגשי הלב, אין מעמד בטוח ליצר לב האדם שלא ימעדו אשוריו כ”כ, עד שיהי’ עוד הפעם ראוי להמחות חלילה מן הארץ.

אמנם ביצירה אנושית חזקה ורבת אונים, יש שיהי’ השכל הטהור לבדו מספיק להנחות את האדם בדרך אורה.

השגת האמת גם בלא תלבושת של הרחבת הרגש והגעגועים המוסריים, תוכל לנהל באורח ישרה איש גדול כח לב.

ונראה שזאת היתה תעודת האדם קודם המבול, שהיה אמיץ מאד, וכגופו כן נפשו וכחות שכלו, היו כבירי כח.

אמנם כיון שהשחית דרכו, כבר הי’ צריך מאד שיהיה לו מערכה מקשרת את הדעה הגבוהה ומושגי האמת הטהורה אל ההנהגה הקבועה בדרך ישרה לכל דרכי החיים.

וע”ז הי’ הצורך בברית הקשת, להזריח האור בענין, ונראתה הקשת בענן והיה לאות ברית.

the flood, Hashem gave the first mitzvot, the seven Noachide Laws. These laws not only explained on an intellectual level what is moral and what is not, but created a system by which to live on a practical level.

This is the symbol of the rainbow. A grand light is hard to grasp, but when light shines through a prism it breaks down into separate and distinct colours. The intellectual truths of the world before the flood were not enough to change humanity, rather a system that broke up these truths into clear, distinct, and concrete laws was vital to human success. 🌈



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