



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת נח תשע"א פ'תשע"א 5771 Parshas Noach

THE NEW WORLD

They say that big things come in small packages. Such is the case with a particularly enigmatic remark of Chazal on this week's *parshah*. Following the *Mabul* (Flood), which wiped out basically all of existence. By the time it was all over, only Noach, his family, and a representative pair of every animal species remained.

Finally, the passengers of the *teivah* (ark) were instructed by Hashem to exit. They emerged onto dry land, as described in this week's *parshah* (*Bereishis* 8:18-19):

וַיֵּצֵא נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׂי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ כָּל הַחַיָּה כָּל הַרְמֵשׁ וְכָל הָעוֹף כָּל רוֹמֵשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיהֶם יֵצְאוּ מִן הַתֵּיבָה.

“And Noach went out, and his sons, wife, and sons’ wives with him. All of the animals, creepers, and birds, all that crawl on the ground, left the *teivah* by their families.”

It is this final phrase that Chazal pick up on, adding a terse comment by way of explanation. Their exposition is recorded in the Gemara in Sanhedrin (108b): “לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם -- וְלֹא הֵם. “Their families’ – and not they, themselves.”

The commentators are bewildered by this two-word statement of Chazal. “Their families – and not them”? What could it possibly mean?

SPINELESS SLUGS

One interpretation is advanced by R’ Yeshayah Pick (and explained by the *Maharitz Chiyos*, *Sanhedrin*, *ibid.*). It seems that R’ Yeshayah understood that

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the exposition focused on the final item of the list of animals in the *passuk* – “All that crawl on the ground.” Apparently, this group refers to the invertebrate slithering creatures (worms, leeches, etc.), a class of boneless animals.

R’ Yeshayah bases his interpretation on the Talmudic statement (*Chullin* 58a) that the lifespan of boneless creatures is less than twelve months. Add to this another vital piece of information, as recorded in the Mishnah in *Eduyos* (2:10):

מִשְׁפֵּט דוֹר הַמַּבּוּל, שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ.

“The Flood spanned a twelve-month period.”

The inescapable conclusion is that those worms who entered the *teivah* at the beginning of the Flood could not have left it at the Flood’s end; they must have perished sometime during the twelve-month period. Rather, it must be that the worms gave birth inside the *teivah*, sometime during the course of the *Mabul*. It was this new generation of creepers that exited the *teivah* and went out into the world to perpetuate their species.

Accordingly, Chazal’s exposition reads as follows: The crawling creatures left the *teivah* “*l’mishp’chosai’hem*” – by their families, i.e., the offspring who were representative of their species; “*v’lo heim*” – but not *them*, i.e., not the original individuals, as they expired while still in the *teivah*.

Presenting a different approach, the Meshech Chochmah explains this teaching in a more all-encompassing way. He perceives that this terse statement of Chazal contains great depth and is quite revealing of the overall purpose and message of the

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whole episode of the Flood.

RE-EDUCATION

In truth, the very notion of the Flood seems difficult to understand: why, in fact, was it necessary? In other words, while the world's denizens had corrupted their way and were deserving of destruction, the goal could ostensibly have been accomplished in a much more "efficient" manner. The Omnipotent One is capable of anything, obviously; why not cause the wicked to simply disappear, pre-empting the need for a *teivah* and a twelve-month flood altogether? A nuclear bomb (or some other form of spontaneous global vaporization) would have been much quicker and neater, don't you think?

Obviously, Hashem had something else in mind. The Meshech Chochmah explains that the purpose of the *Mabul* went far beyond merely ridding the world of evil people. Rather, it was a complete recalibration off the entire (Creation).

The *sifrei mussar* (ethical works) repeatedly emphasize the far-reaching consequences – both good and bad – of man's deeds. When a person fulfills a mitzvah, for example, the act is not an isolated one, restricted to shoring up the doer's personal store of merits. Rather, the spiritual effects are felt throughout the universe (as discussed at length in the *sefer Nefesh Hachaim*). Likewise, the results of the commission of an *aveirah* (misdeed) are not limited to the perpetrator; but the shockwaves reverberate throughout Creation.

The degeneracy of the *Dor Hamabul* (Generation of the Flood), then, was particularly egregious. Through their perverted actions, they introduced a contaminating effect to the entire world. All creatures and, indeed, all of Creation, were tainted with and corrupted by this spiritual pollution. To a certain extent, the people's wickedness laid Creation to spiritual waste.

And so, to rectify this desolation, it would not have been enough to simply "remove" the perpetrators.

The entirety of Creation and its inhabitants (those that were designated to remain) would have to undergo a process of purification. The Wisdom of the Creator beheld that a twelve-month period was necessary to effect such "decontamination."

The *teivah*, then, was not merely a means of rescuing the representative elements of the earth's inhabitants. Rather, it was a staging ground for the improvement and refinement of their very essence and character. Before the *Mabul*, every creature had been somewhat infected by the spiritual corrosion that permeated the atmosphere. By the Flood's end, they emerged as different beings.

This idea is contained in the words of Chazal, in their exposition of the *passuk*. The surviving inhabitants left the *teivah* to repopulate the world and propagate their species. "They left by their families," but – "*v'lo heim*" – they were not themselves. They were not the same individuals who entered the *teivah*, but were members of the new, refined world.

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