



The Essence of "מבול"

By David Attar ('23)

The second Parashah in the Torah, Parashat Noach, describes the sins of the inhabitants of the Earth and the flood that wiped them out. Ten generations after Adam's original sin, the people of earth were still sinning. Rashi specifies the three chief examples of the people's descent to sin: immorality, idolatry, and thievery. Hashem punishes the people of the world by bringing a מבול, flood, that destroys the world and gets rid of all humans except Noach and his family. It is noteworthy that the Torah uses the word "מבול" for the flood instead of other viable options such as שיטפון or הצפה. This particular word was chosen because of an interesting lesson this word portrays. The word מבול has a Gematriah value of 78, which is the same as that of the word חנך, the Hebrew verb "to educate." This captures the fundamental purpose of the מבול. The primary purpose of the flood was not just killing for the sake of killing, but it was to educate and teach those who survived (Noach and family) what happens when people stray from their morals and God.

In Rambam's Mishneh Torah, he famously states that with regard to all traits, one must try to find a middle path (Hilchot Dei'ot 1:2). However, one should leave the middle path in the cases of anger and arrogance to ensure that he or she is never angry or arrogant. Rambam brings two exceptions to when one can act out of anger: when disciplining one's children or one's community. Even then, one must only feel love in his heart as he knows that he is only expressing anger for the benefit of his children or community. Hashem used the Lashon of "מבול" to ensure that people understand that even when they need to punish people and show anger on the inside, they must feel only love for the people who they are educating. In the coming weeks, let us all remember the tremendous love we must have for our fellow Jews, and even when someone needs to be disciplined, we should only do it out of love and for education.

"Eileh Toledot Noach"

By Max Zurkovsky ('23)

Rashi on "Make for yourself an ark" (BeReishit 6:14) says that there are numerous ways by which HaKadosh Baruch Hu could have saved Noach; why, then, did he burden him with this construction [of the Teivah]? So that the men of Dor HaMabul see him busy with it for 120 years and ask him, "What do you need this for?" And he says to them, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu will bring a flood upon the world." Perhaps they will do Teshuvah

[Sanhedrin 108b]. Siftei Chachamim poses a difficulty in understanding "Perhaps they will do Teshuvah" (Rashi, BeReishit 6:14): On the contrary, the building of the Teivah will lead them not to do Teshuvah, for they will answer Noach: "If it was true that you built a Teivah for you to be saved from the flood, are there not many ways to save you even without a Teivah?!"

Hashem indeed has many ways to save Noach, even without the Teivah, but this answer is due to a lack of understanding. The Ramban on "From all flesh" (BeReishit 6:19) explains: They made it (the Teivah) large in order to reduce the miracle for such is the way with all miracles in the Torah and the Nevi'im: to do what is in the hand of man to do, and the remainder is in the hands of Heaven.

Siftei Chachamim (on Rashi, BeReishit 6:14) concludes: The answer is: They knew the flood would come, as Rashi explained in connection with the story of Lemech's wives (4:24). But, they thought it would come in the distant future. From Noach building the Teivah, they saw that now it would come; thus, they might do Teshuvah (Nachalat Yaakov).

Anaf Etz Avot says on "Rabbi Tarfon said: The day is short" (Pirkei Avos 2:20): This sentiment is expressed in the Passuk (Divrei HaYamim I 29:15), "As a shadow are our days upon the earth." Our Sages comment upon this (Midrash Rabbah, Vayechi 96:2): It would be fortunate for us if this were referring to the shadow of a wall or a tree! Instead, it refers to the shadow of a passing bird, as the Passuk says (Tehillim 144:4), "His days are like a fleeting shadow." (See also Midrash Rabbah, beginning of Kohelet.) The Passuk continues (Divrei HaYamim I 29:15), "And there is no hope" — there is no hope to escape death, as everyone knows they will eventually die, as the Passuk says (Tehillim 89:49), "Which man shall live and not see death?" The Gemara says (Eruvin 65a): As Rav Chisda would often learn all night long, his daughter said to him, "Do you not wish to sleep a little bit?" He responded, "The day shall come, the day of death when I shall have a long time to sleep and little opportunity for Torah and mitzvot."

Torah Temimah, son of the Aruch HaShulchan, says on "And there is no authority over the day of death" (Kohelet 8:8): Rabbanan say, "no man is authorized to say to the Angel of Death, 'give me until I think of my account and afterward I'll come.'"

Pirkei De'Rebbi Eliezer (ch. 34) brings a Mashal: Three friends a man has in his life, and they are these: his sons and household, his money, and his good deeds. In the hour of his departure from the world, he calls to his sons and his household and says to them, "I beg you to remove me from the

judgment of this evil death.” They say to him, “haven’t you heard: “And there is no authority over the day of death” (Kohelet 8:8)? And, is it not thus written, “A brother cannot redeem a man” (Tehillim 49:8)?”

Pirkei De'Rebbi Eliezer (ch. 22) says about Dor HaMabul: “They said, “if the waters of the flood came upon us, behold, we are of high stature, and the waters will not reach up to our necks. And if the waters of the depths rise upon us, behold, the soles of our feet can close up the depths.” What did they do? They put forth the soles of their feet and closed up all the depths. What did HaKadosh Baruch Hu do? He heated the waters of the depths and burnt their flesh and peeled off their skin from them, as it says, “At the time they become hot, they retreat; when it is hot, they jump from their place” (Iyov 6:17). Do not read, ‘when it is hot (בְּחֹמֶה)’ rather, ‘in his hot waters (בְּחַמְיָו).”

Masechet Gittin (56b) says about Titus: At sea, a wave rose against him to drown him. He said, “It seems to me that the G-d of these has no might except with water. Came Pharaoh, He drowned him in water. Came Sisera, He drowned him in water. Here too, He stands against me to drown me in water. If he’s a Gibor, He will go up to dry land and make war with me.” Came out a Bat Kol, and it said to him, “Wicked one, son of a wicked one, grandson of Eisav the wicked one, a lowly creature I have in My world, and its name is Yatush. (Why is it called a lowly creature? Because it has an entrance but not an exit.) Go up to dry land and make war with it.” He came up to dry land. Came a Yatush and entered his nostril and picked at his brain for seven years. One day he passed by the gate of a blacksmith’s shop. [The Yatush] heard the sound of a hammer, [so it] became silent. He said, “There is a remedy.” Every day they would bring a blacksmith who hammered before him. To a Goy, he would give four Zuz; to a Jew, he said, “it is enough for you that you see your enemy suffering.” For thirty days, he did this. From then onward, since it became accustomed [to the sound], it was accustomed [to picking at his brain]. It was taught in a Braitta: said Rabbi Pinchas Ben Aroova, “I was among Gedolei Romi and when he (Titus) died they split open his head and found [the Yatush] like a bird weighing two Sela’im.” It was taught in a Braitta: like a Gozal (a young pigeon), a year old weighing two Litrin. Said Abayey, “We have a tradition that its mouth was of copper and its claws were of iron. When [Titus] was dying, he said to [his attendants], ‘Burn that man (me) and scatter his ashes across the seven seas, so the G-d of the Jews should not find me and stand me for judgment.”” Onkelos Bar Kalonikos, the son of Titus’s sister, wanted to convert. He went and raised Titus through Negida (Rashi: Ov). He said to him, “Who is important in that world?” He (Titus) said to him, “Yisrael.” [Onkelos said] “Should I attach to them?” He said to him, “Their commandments are numerous and you will not be able to fulfill them. Go battle against them in that world, and you will become the chief, as it is written, “Tzareha have become the head” (Eicha 1:5). Anyone who is HaMeitzar (the one who distresses) Le’Yisrael will become a chief.” He (Onkelos) said to him, “What is the judgment of that man (Titus)?” He said to him, “That which he decreed against himself. Every day his ashes are gathered, and they judge him, burn him, and scatter him over the seven seas.”

Rashi says on “And also after that” (BeReishit 6:4): Even though they saw Dor Enosh’s destruction, the ocean rose and flooded Shlish HaOlam, Dor HaMabul did not humble themselves to learn from them.

Thus, like Titus, Dor HaMabul, in their great folly, sought to prevail over a Heavenly decree through a physical remedy. They would not humble themselves or learn from the wicked and do Teshuvah, so they were destroyed in their wickedness. They would not admit the truth explained in Orchot Tzadikim in its Sha’ar HaZechirah: The sun does every day as Hashem Yitbarach commands it, and if there would be one day that it did not rise and there would be darkness — how spectacular would this be in the eyes of the world! Or, if the waters of the sea overrun Hashem’s boundary, they would destroy all the world! Or, if the ground would not give its produce and fruit, all the world would be dead! And now, see that all things do as His messengers, so how will man not be ashamed to accustom his limbs that were created to guard the Torah as he teaches and accustoms his limbs to violate the Torah?!

It seems that Dor HaMabul had not done Teshuvah since Noach had not devoted himself to them.

The Zohar (1:67b) says: HaKadosh Baruch Hu had told him that he and his children would be saved by the Teivah, as it is written, “And as for Me — Behold, I will bring the flood waters” (BeReishit 6:17). And it is written, “And I will blot out all existence that I have made from off the face of the earth” (BeReishit 7:4) and, “And I, behold I am setting up Beriti” (BeReishit 9:9) and, “And you will come to the Teivah” (BeReishit 6:18). Since He said to him that He would save him and his children, Noach did not pray for mercy on the world and they (Dor HaMabul) were destroyed. For this, the flood waters are named after him, as it says, “For as the waters of Noach is this to Me: As I have sworn never again to pass the waters of Noach over the earth” (Yishaya 54:9).

Masechet Berachot (10a) says: There were these hooligans in Rabbi Meir’s neighborhood who caused him a great deal of anguish. Rabbi Meir prayed for mercy on them, that they should die. Berurya, his wife, said to him, “What is your thinking? Since it is written, “Let sins cease from the land” (Tehillim 104:35)? Is it written, “sinners?” “Sins” is written. Moreover, go to the end of the Passuk, “And the wicked will be no more” (ibid). Because they will stop sinning, “And the wicked will be no more.” Rather, pray for mercy on them, that they should do Teshuvah, “And the wicked will be no more” (ibid). He prayed for mercy on them, and they did Teshuvah.

The Mashal continues (Pirkei De’Rebbi Eliezer, ch. 34): And even from money that he loves, he cannot redeem himself, as it says, “He will not give G-d his ransom” (Tehillim 49:8). Why? “And costly is a redemption of their soul, and unattainable forever” (Tehillim 49:9). And he has his money fetched and says to it, “For you have I toiled very much by night and by day. I beg of you, redeem me from this death.” And it answers him, “And have you not heard, “Of no avail is wealth on the day of wrath” (Mishlei 11:4)?”

One should see his money only as a Nisayon and a means of performing Mitzvot. For one to forgo the fulfillment of Mitzvot — such as to read Shema and wear Tefillin — and thereby cast from himself the yoke of Heaven for his livelihood

is vanity, as Rashi says on “Under the sun” (Kohelet 1:3): Instead of the Torah that is called “Light,” as it says, “And Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23), all that labor which he does instead of the toil of Torah, what reward is in it? Rashi explains on (Chaggai 2:8) “The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine”: And it’s in My hand to bring it to whomever I desire.

Kli Yakar (VaYikra 14:34) says: There is no place for stinginess, to think that “My strength and the might of my hand accumulated for me this wealth” (Devarim 8:17).

In Tana Debei Eliyahu (Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter 14) Eliyahu HaNavi says: One time I was going from place to place, and I found one man who had in him no Mikrah and no Mishnah and would make fun of and scoff at things, and he came opposite me. And, I said to him, “My son, what answer will you give to your Father in Heaven on the Day of Judgment?” He said to me, “Rabbi, I have things that I would answer Him: ‘understanding and knowledge were not given to me from Heaven that I would read Mikrah and study Mishnah.’” I said to him, “My son, what is your occupation?” And, he said to me, “I am a trapper,” and I said to him, “My son, who taught you and said to you that you should bring linen threads, make nets, throw them to sea and raise fish out of the sea?” He said, “About this, they gave me understanding and knowledge from Heaven.” I said to him, “And what? To bring linen threads and to make nets and to throw to sea and to raise fish from the water, they gave you understanding and knowledge from Heaven, but for words of Torah, about which it is written ‘For the matter is close to you very much — in your mouth and in your heart to do it’ (Devarim 30:14), they didn’t give you understanding and knowledge from Heaven?” He immediately began to raise his voice and weep and sigh. And I said to him, “My son, do not be upset; rather, all the rest of the sons of man in the world give this answer on this Inyan that they’re busy with, but their actions are rebuke on them; and on them and the like and those who do like their actions, what is written on them? Yishayah (19:9) says, “And those who work at flax to be combed and those who weave nets shall be ashamed.”

After this, he fetches his good deeds, and he says to them, “come and save me from this death and strengthen yourselves with me.” And they answer him, “go towards peace. Before you go, verily, we will go in advance of you, as it says (Yishayah 58:8), “and will walk before you Tzidkecha” (Pirkei De’Rebbi Eliezer, ch. 34).

Anaf Eitz Avot in its Hakdamah, brings a statement from the Arizal in Sha’ar HaGilgulim (Yerushalayim, 5628, p. 62b): “For a very small act in toiling in Torah and mitzvot in these generations is equivalent to many great mitzvot accomplished in previous generations. For in these generations, “the other side” is very overpowering, to the point of endlessness, and therefore, a small amount is considered a very large one.”

Midrash Tanchuma says on “Eileh Toledot Noach” (BeReishit 6:9): “Thus opened Rabbi Tanchuma son of Aba and said, “Fruit of a Tzadik is a tree of life, and a taker of souls is wise” (Mishlei 11:30). Said Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, “in the hour that man is removed from the world without children, he grieves and weeps. HaKadosh Baruch Hu says to him, “why are you weeping? Because you didn’t raise fruit in this world, you have fruit better than children.” He says before Him, “Ribono

Shel Olam, which fruit did I raise?” HaKadosh Baruch Hu says to him, “The Torah, concerning which it is written, “Fruit of a Tzadik is a Tree of Life” (Mishlei 11:30). ‘Children’, it does not say, rather, “Fruit of a Tzadik” (Mishlei 11:30). And, likewise, a man’s offspring — these are his good deeds. And, likewise, He says, “These are offspring of Noach, Noach — A Man, Tzadik, Tamim” (BeReishit 6:9).

Akavia ben Mahallalel vs. Current Politics

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Politics as Ultra-Sheker

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the author of the Beit HaLevi, told his son Rav Chaim that politics are “Sheker”, falsehood. If so, responded the sharp-witted Rav Chaim, why not call politics “Sheker”? To this question the Beit HaLevi brilliantly responded “then there would be something truthful to politics.” The state of politics has recently deteriorated so severely that we sadly refer to it as “ultra-Sheker.”

Akavia ben Mahallalel – The Anti-Politician

There is a silver lining to this very gray cloud. When we compare Torah and Torah personalities to politics, the Torah’s authenticity shines through. The Tanna Akavia ben Mahallalel serves as the classic paradigm for devotion to Emet. This Tanna maintained four unique Halachic views which were rejected by the overwhelming majority of his colleagues. The Mishna (Eduyot 5:6) tells the following stunning story:

They said to him: Akavia, retract these four things which you say, and we will make you the head of the court in Israel. He said to them: it is better for me to be called a fool all my days than that I should become [even] for one hour a wicked man before God.

The Chachamim were quite reasonable in making this demand from Akavia. After all, if he is to serve as the Av Beit Din (head of the Sanhedrin), he cannot be issuing rulings that counter the rabbinic opinion.

Nonetheless, Akavia declined the prestigious appointment. He was concerned that his acquiescence to the majority view would be perceived as compromising his principles in order to achieve power. Therefore, Akavia refused a very prominent position in order to avoid Chillul Hashem.

What a stark contrast there is between Akavia and typical politicians! The latter routinely deviate from any semblance of fidelity or principle in order to advance their careers. To Akavia, though, even just the appearance of compromising principle is anathema.

Akavia’s Death Bed

The Kiddush Hashem continues as the next Mishna recounts the scene of Akavia ben Mahallalel’s deathbed:

At the time of his death he said to his son, “Retract the four opinions which I used to declare.” Akavia’s son then said to him, “Why did not you retract them?” Akvia responded, “I heard them from the mouth of the many, and the Chachamim heard [the contrary] from the mouth of the many. I stood fast by the tradition which I heard, and they stood fast by the tradition which they heard. But you have heard my tradition from the mouth of a single individual and their tradition from the mouth of the many. It is better to leave the opinion of the single individual and to hold by the opinion of the many.” His

son said to him, "Father, commend me to your colleagues." Akavia said back, "I will not commend you." He said to his father, "Have you found in me any wrong?" Akavia answered, "No; your own deeds will cause you to be near, and your own deeds will cause you to be far."

We would expect Akavia to order his son to continue to wage his war and make every effort to help his four unique views gain traction. Instead, Akavia does the exact opposite when he tells his son not to continue in his path regarding these matters.

Akavia's life was devoted to promoting his own correct views. His agenda was only the Torah and the truth of Torah. He did not sacrifice his views when it was inappropriate to do but he did relinquish his ideas if it became the right thing to do.

Akavia is transmitting to his son a powerful message of devotion to truth when he explains that he will not unjustly advance his son's career. His son must legitimately earn his place among the great Rabbis. Nepotism and favoritism has no place in an authentic Torah environment¹.

One can hardly imagine a single contemporary politician who lives up to the high standard set by Akavia. In the Torah world, one who acts like a politician to advance his standing will soon be discovered and disregarded. Even the most learned of rabbis will find people ignoring his views if he misuses Torah authority to advance his standing.

Rashi and Tosafot

Akavia ben Mahallel's authenticity and zealous pursuit of truth continued in the time of the Rishonim. A number of times in their respective commentaries, Rishonim will admit to being incorrect. For example, Rashi raises a question regarding something that he candidly concedes he does not know the answer to. Tosafot as well at times will raise a powerful question and openly acknowledge that they do not have an answer. When was the last time you heard a politician openly acknowledge that he does not know the answer to the question posed to them?

An Interaction between Rav Baruch Simon and Rav Ovadia Yosef

Rav Baruch Simon, a highly regarded Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University, relates that he sat down next to Rav Ovadia Yosef when the latter visited Yeshiva University and ate at its cafeteria in 1991. Rav Simon posed a number of questions to Rav Ovadia, including how to determine that a Sukkah is not positioned under a tree – by eyesight or plumb line?

Shockingly, Rav Ovadia responded that he does not know the answer. Integrity on display! What courage it took Rav Ovadia to not obfuscate and try to offer an answer!

No wonder we Jews love the Torah! The Gemara (Shabbat 104a) teaches that falsehood does not stand the test of time, the truth does. In his humble admission of his inability to answer the question, Rav Ovadia demonstrates why his

¹ Similarly, Rabi Yehudah HaNasi, the author of the Mishna at times stunningly does not even present his own opinion when it runs counter to the consensus view! An example is the Mishna (Menachot 38a) which records that Techelet are not essential for Tzitzit. Rabi Yehuda HaNasi did not record his own view that runs counter to this Mishna!

Halachic opinions are viewed as solid gold and continue to stand the test of time.

Rav Yehuda Amital's Stunning Humility

I myself have experienced true humility in all its glory first-hand. Here is one stunning example.

Yeshivat Har Etzion's two Roshei Yeshiva, Rav Amital and Rav Lichtenstein, would rotate in delivering a Shiur Kelali to the entire Yeshiva each week. These Shiurim were absolute masterpieces revealing the unmatched depth of Torah learning. The learning was so magnificent, I felt that even the Malachim and Hashem joined these Shiurim.

In the winter of 1982, Rav Amital was delivering a superb Shiur Kelali when all of a sudden at about forty minutes into the Shiur, one of the older students raised a very powerful question. We were all expecting Rav Amital to respond with a commensurately compelling answer.

To everyone's surprise, Rav Amital exclaimed "Harasta Et HaShiur!" "you have destroyed the Shiur!" and promptly ended the lecture. I thought I had an answer and rushed to share my thoughts with Rav Amital and rescue the Shiur. Rav Amital looked at me and said "Chaim, Hu Tzodek," "Chaim, the student is correct in his question." At which time, Rav Amital asked me to help him return the many Sefarim he was using to their proper place.

What honesty and integrity for a prominent rabbi to admit before five hundred students that someone thirty years his junior had bested him! Most interestingly, Rav Amital did not seem upset at all after the incident. He even seemed quite pleased at his student's success!

I have had many such experiences in my many interactions with rabbis of note. I trust that every advanced Yeshiva student has experienced similar events. This is the Emet of Torah on glorious display. This type of behavior is not at all part of today's politician's modus operandi.

Conclusion

On weekend mornings we say towards the end of Shacharit, "Baruch Elkeinu SheHivdilanu Min HaTo'im VeNatan Lanu Torat Emet," "Blessed is Hashem Who separated us from those who stray and gave us the Torah of truth." From Akavia ben Mahallel to Rashi to Rav Amital, each generation of authentic Torah leaders sets an example of absolute fidelity to Torah and Emet. While today's politics makes us recoil in frustration and even disgust, it does provide a sharp contrast to the truth and integrity of Torah.

Ashreinu Mah Tov Chelkeinu! How fortunate are we to learn Torah, love Torah, and live Torah.

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