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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH ACTUALIZING UNITY

The people of the generation of the Tower of Bavel were unified; the world's masses were all involved in a great building project. They shared a goal – building a massive tower – and directed their joint efforts towards its completion. They were on the path to success.

But Hashem stopped the project because, as midrashim explain, their motivation was negative. He stopped the project by “confusing their language.” What can we learn from the method Hashem used to stop the Tower project?

Despite that generation's unified spirit and (in their eyes) great joint project – without the ability to communicate clearly, they were not able to implement their goals. The project came to a standstill and the result was the Great Dispersion. Through that episode Hashem taught us that lack of proper communication can sabotage an otherwise successful joint effort.

Just as lack of coherent communication broke up a negative project, it can also destroy positive ones. And just like people who speak different languages misunderstand each other, so can those who speak the same language. Without coherent communication, even those who unify to accomplish wonderful goals will not be able to actualize them.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 38:10, echoed by Rashi's comment on Bereishit 11:7) gives us a graphic description of what happened when the people of the world ceased to communicate in one language: “One person asked for an axe and the other gave him a shovel; and [the first reacted by] cracking open the other's skull.”

The Midrash refers to two types of communications skills. The first is being able to properly listen, to understand what the speaker really wants and needs – to hear “axe” when he says “axe.” The second skill is no less important – communicating clearly so the listener properly understands what the speaker meant – to say “axe” so it will not be misinterpreted as “shovel.”

Marriage is one of the main areas where the lesson of the Tower of Bavel applies. A married couple is unified, sharing goals and dreams. Throughout their lives they are engaged in a great joint effort. But they need proper communication to be able to implement their goals and avoid filling their lives with friction.

The generation of the Tower of Babel turned unity towards negative ends, so Hashem removed their ability to communicate. He stopped their project by preventing its implementation. Marriage is unity dedicated to holiness, love and giving, but demands clear communication to actualize those great goals.

May Hashem teach us all how to communicate in a clear and healthy way.

SOURCE GUIDE: PRE-FLOOD VS. POST-FLOOD

The Torah describes the structure of Noah's Ark in detail. We are told its precise dimensions, which materials it was made from, and its internal and external structure. Why doesn't the Torah just say that Hashem saved Noah through the Ark he told him to build? The Malbim (Harav Meir Leib ben Yechiel Michel, זצ"ל, 1809-1877) answers that each of the details reflects an aspect of the contrast between the pre-Flood and post-Flood world. This source guide is built on the Malbim's comments.

A. The Post-Flood World

The Malbim opens his explanation of the structure of the ark with one sentence:

1. Malbim on Bereishit 6:14 According to a metaphorical interpretation, this Ark is a model of the new world that will rise up after the Flood.	מלבי"ם על בראשית ו:יד לפי הרמז היה בתיבה זו דוגמא אל העולם החדש שיקום אחר המבול.
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Man, through his free choice, destroyed the wonderful world that Hashem created. Man brought on the Great Flood. After the Flood, Hashem will not, says the Malbim, just re-create an identical world and try again. Instead, He introduced some significant changes into the world to prevent the previous downfall. The Ark is a model of the new world. Its details reflect the changes Hashem will introduce into the post-Flood world. The new world must be built differently than the old one in order to avoid another downfall. [Hashem, of course, did not make a mistake in creating the world. Everything was "very good," but Man misused his free will and destroyed the world. The new world will be built differently.]

Here are the three verses that describe the Ark:

2. Bereishit 6:14-16 (14) Make for yourself an Ark of gofer wood; make compartments for the Ark; and spread pitch on both its inside and outside. (15) This is how you should make it: the length of the Ark should be three-hundred cubits; fifty cubits should be its width; and its height should be thirty cubits. (16) Make a window for the Ark; and have its roof taper off to one cubit. Place the opening of the Ark on its side; make a bottom, second, and third floor.	בראשית ו:יד-טז (יד) עשה לך תבת עצי גפר קנים תעשה את התבה וכפרת אתה מבית ומחוץ בכפר. (טו) וזה אשר תעשה אתה שלש מאות אמה ארך התבה תמשים אמה רחבה ושלשים אמה קומתה. (טז) צהר תעשה לתבה ואל אמה תכלנה מלמעלה ופתח התבה בצדה תשים תחתים שנים ושלשים תעשה.
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B. Gofer Wood

What is the significance of gofer wood (that appears nowhere else in Tanach)?

2. Malbim on Bereishit 6:14 The Ark is the world that will now float on the face of the waters that are destroying the old world. For in the old world physicality and its earthy component overcame its spiritual and airy component. But the new world will be made of light gofer wood that easily floats on the water because its airy component outweighs its heavy earthy component. This hints that in the new world earthiness and physicality will be lessened, and spirituality will be more powerful. This will be explained further when we discuss the rainbow, which also indicates this [increase in spirituality].	מלבי"ם על בראשית ו:יד והוא העולם שישוט בה עתה על פני המים המשחיתים את העולם הישן, שהחומר וחלק העפרורי גבר בו על הרוחני וחלק האוירי, אבל העולם החדש יבנה מעצי גופר הקל על פני מים מפני שחלק האוירי שבו מרובה מחלק העפרורי הכבד, וזה רומז שבעולם החדש יתמעט כח העפר והחומר והרוחני יגבר בו יותר. כמו שיתבאר באות הקשת שהי' להוראה זו.
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The proportion of physicality to spirituality will change in the new world. In the old world, once Man sinned he sunk deeply into the abundant physicality and coarseness of pre-Flood existence.

C. Compartments

The Ark's division into compartments alludes to the separation of people in the post-Flood world:

3. Malbim on Bereishit 6:14

He commanded to divide it up into compartments. This is an allusion that after the Flood people will spread to different climates and countries. Then, if one family or country becomes corrupt, others will not learn from it – like it was before the Flood when all of them lived in one country.

מלבי"ם על בראשית ו:יד
וצוה שיעשה אותה קנים. ר"ל שהאנשים
יפוצו אחר המבול לאקלימים ומדינות
שונות, עד שאם תשחית משפחה או מדינה
אחת את דרכה לא ילמדו אחרים ממנה כמו
שהיה קודם המבול שדרו כולם במדינה
אחת.

D. Pitch, Dimensions, Window

The Malbim explains the allusions behind three other aspects of the Ark's structure:

- Pitch** within and outside the Ark indicates that G-d's Providence will influence within and above the world.
- The gematria of the Ark's **dimensions** hint at G-d's "Sukkah of Peace" that will protect the world.
- The **window** alludes to how great tzaddikim will influence the world and preserve its spiritual state.

WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

When mankind's doom is decided irreversibly, Hashem commands Noach and his family to enter the Ark: "And you will come to the Ark, you, and your sons, and your wife and your sons' wives with you" (Bereishit 6:18). As Rashi points out, that this command requires: "the men separately and the women separately."

Noach's family obeys: "And Noach came with his sons, and his wife and his sons' wives with him, to the Ark, from before the waters of the Flood" (Bereishit 7:7). Rashi explains that the married couples were commanded to remain celibate during the time that the Flood waters covered the earth (Bereishit Rabbah 31:32; Sanhedrin 108a).

When the earth is dry, Hashem permits them to resume marital life: "Leave the Ark, you and your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives with you" (Bereishit 8:16). However, they do not return to normal relations yet: "And Noach went out with his sons, and his wife and his sons' wives with him" (Bereishit 8:18).

Bereishit Rabbah explains that they were waiting for Hashem's blessings, and His assurance that the world would not be destroyed again. After all, Noach's family was to be responsible for repopulating a destroyed world.

Hashem's blessing comes after Noach's sacrifice: "And G-d blessed Noach and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And you, be fruitful and multiply, swarm on the earth and multiply on it" (Bereishit 9:1, 7). Rashi (Bereishit 9:7) explains that the first statement is a blessing and the second is a command. And Noach's sons fulfill this command after the Flood, as we read in Chapter 10.

But why were Noach and his family required to separate in the first place? Malbim takes a practical approach: the population had to be controlled so as to prevent overcrowding and food shortages in the Ark. Indeed, Sanhedrin 108b states that the creatures in the Ark were forbidden to procreate. The Zohar (Bereishit 204a) says that the Ark was "the tent of Hashem," where marital relations are inappropriate. Besides, it says, children conceived while the world is cursed would be cursed as well. However, most commentaries, beginning with Rashi (Bereishit 7:7) say that relations were forbidden "because the world was immersed in sorrow." As the Talmud (Ta'anit 11a) says: One who pains himself with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

It is insufficient to "feel sorry" that others are suffering. A tragedy that strikes the community must be realized and appreciated by all, including those individuals who are spared from the tragedy. One must identify with the community, both in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

Thus, when the Children of Israel fought Amelek (Shemot 17:11-12), Moshe joined them, although he was not a combatant. He raised his hands throughout the battle, since Israel was “immersed in sorrow.” Also, it is recorded that “to Yosef were born two sons before the years of famine” (Bereishit 41:50), because during a famine, one should refrain from marital relations (Rashi). On the other hand, Elimelech is punished for leaving the land of Israel during a famine (Ruth 1:1-3), because he separated himself from the community. One must identify with the misfortunes of the community. Thus, Jewish law requires that, during times of famine, even one who has food should eat sparingly, both in order to share the food with others, as well as to feel the pain of those who have nothing (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 574:4; 240:12).

If a person cannot feel the community’s pain he is not truly a part of the community. As Vladimir Jabotinsky (1881-1940), leader of the Zionist-Revisionists, said: “When you cut a man’s foot and he doesn’t scream, it means that the foot is paralyzed.”

Noach and his family were spared by Hashem from the waters of the Flood because Noach remained a righteous man in a corrupt world. Still, they were a part of that world, and needed to be reminded of this. Hashem teaches Noach: Although the people of the world deserve destruction, and you and your family deserve to be spared, you cannot consider yourselves detached from them; while your community suffers, you must join in their hardship. These survivors were like a body that has suffered multiple amputations; they were not permitted to feel self-satisfied and turn their backs upon the rest of humankind. They were obligated to share the pain of their human family, if humankind was to deserve to survive. No community is without its faults. Yet, the survival of the community depends on its most righteous members feeling at one with its most unrighteous members.

The Jewish community, as well, is a world-wide interdependent body. Some parts of the Jewish world suffer – from poverty, assimilation, anti-Semitism and persecution – while others are safe and prosperous. Jews in the Land of Israel are buffeted by international opposition, plagued by terror, burdened by military service. Jews in the Diaspora face uncertainties in identity, the flaring up of hatred, and blistering criticism.

And, throughout the Jewish world, there are more committed Jews and less committed ones, virtuous Jews and flawed Jews, Jews of every political stripe and religious perspective. Despite the vast differences, the unity of the Jewish world must be maintained. We are a body, a family. The suffering of some must be felt by all.

The Jewish people’s survival depends on each of us being committed to our unity. It is hard to say, in our present-day world, which of us is “in the ark” and which are “outside the ark”; but we are all in the same boat.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.