

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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4 CHESHVAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS NOACH

Clothes Call

He (Noach) drank from the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself in his tent. Cham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers... Shem and Yefes took a garment and placed it upon both of their shoulders, and they walked backward and covered their father's nakedness... (9:22-23)

Rashi (9:22) explains the circumstances of these events: Noach's son Cham (upon seeing his father naked and passed out drunk) emasculated his father and joyfully reported his actions to his brothers. Rashi (9:25) further explains that Cham was driven by the desire to eliminate competition for their inheritance: As long as there were three brothers, the world would be divided only among them, but if Noach were to have additional children, they would have to share it with more heirs. In Cham's view, he had done the family a service by mutilating his father.

Upon hearing this, Shem and Yefes quickly went to their father, and very respectfully covered him up. Both Shem and Yefes were rewarded for their action. Yet there is an enormous disparity in the way Noach's two sons were rewarded.

Shem's reward was that his descendants received the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* – a precept that would be observed by every Jewish male, in every generation, on every day of his life. For Yefes, though, the reward was confined to a one-time event later in history: his descendants would be given a proper burial, rather than their dead bodies being left strewn across a battlefield.

Rashi explains that this disparity is because Shem's merit was greater since he acted with greater alacrity than Yefes in the performance of this *mitzvah*. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that a modicum of extra effort – a mere technical difference between the actions

of the two – led to such a colossal difference between the two brothers' rewards.

To properly understand why each one received the reward that he did, one must examine the mindsets and motivations behind their actions. As it turns out, Shem and Yefes had very different reasons for wanting to cover their father.

Shem, who would later lead the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever (where Yaakov Avinu studied for fourteen years) had an innate sensitivity that the human body needs to be covered for its own dignity. After hearing that his father was exposed in his tent, Shem quickly went to remedy the situation. On the other hand, Yefes, who is identified as the father of the Greeks, was the precursor of the well-known Greek philosophy extolling the virtues and beauty of the naked human form. In fact, the name Yefes comes from the Hebrew word "*yafeh* – beautiful." In his mind, the body doesn't need to be covered; however, once he heard that Cham had mutilated the body, he felt compelled to cover it because it was no longer an object of beauty.

Shem, whose instinct was to add dignity to human body by covering it, was rewarded with a dignified article of clothing proclaiming that the wearer is in the service of God – a high honor indeed. Yefes' reward was that the mutilated bodies of his decedents on the battlefield would merit burial – because that was his instinct; to cover a mutilated body.



Did You Know...

Some interesting facts (from *Midrash Rabbah* 31:10-32:11):

1. There's a dispute regarding what light source was in the *teivah*. One opinion says that Noach made a window, while others say that there was a pearl that gave off light. According to the opinion that it was a pearl, they say that the sun and the moon's light did not reach the earth during the flood due to clouds (others say that they didn't function at all). Interestingly, the pearl let them know when it was night and day by giving less light during the day.
2. According to one opinion, the *teivah* had 900 rooms, each 12 by 12 feet (about the typical size of a room on a modern cruise ship).
3. According to Rashi, the bottom floor was for waste, the second floor had the animals, and Noach and his family were on the top floor. Some opinions in the Midrash switch the bottom and top floors, which must have involved a complicated waste disposal system.
4. Noach even took demons on to the *teivah* to save them
5. The fish didn't die because they never sinned and in the deep ocean they were safe.

Peace or Piece?

At the end of the *parsha* (11:1), the Torah relates the story of *Migdal Bavel*. Essentially, the different nations of the world became united with a single language and purpose; to build a tower to enter the heavens in order to launch an attack on Hashem. After descending to examine the situation, Hashem decided (11:9) to confuse their languages and scatter them across the face of the earth. This becomes known as “the dispersion.”

Rashi (ad loc) contrasts the sins of the generation of the flood with that of the generation of the dispersion: The generation of the flood deserved extermination because there was stealing and hostility between them. Even though the generation of the tower committed a seemingly much more heinous sin—by choosing to wage a war on Hashem—their punishment (being scattered) was a lot less severe. As Rashi explains, this is because there was unity and peace between them. In other words, they had united for a common cause (waging a war on Hashem). Rashi concludes “one can learn from here that conflict is hateful and peace is paramount.”

However, if the sole reason for sparing the generation of the dispersion was because of the unity amongst them, then why remove their one redeeming quality by

“mixing their languages and scattering them across the face of the earth?” In fact, by dispersing them and forcing them to try and communicate in different languages, their coalition would inevitably dissolve, and it seems almost guaranteed that they would eventually come to the strife and discord of the generation of the flood! Wouldn’t this eventually lead to their destruction as well?

In order to understand this we must reexamine our understanding of what *shalom* truly means. We often talk about “*shalom bayis*” or “making *shalom*” between people who are feuding. Most people believe that merely getting others to coexist peacefully is the key to creating *shalom*; but this is, at best, an incomplete approach to *shalom*. In this *parsha*, the Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about how to create a lasting *shalom*.

The key component to creating *shalom* is having an individual recognize what is unique about himself, and what he alone contributes. In other words, when a person feels good about himself and secure in the knowledge that he has something special to contribute, he won’t feel threatened by other people and/or their accomplishments. In fact, once he is secure, he can begin to appreciate what

another person might add to a given situation.

This is precisely what Hashem did for the generation of the dispersion. Originally, their unity in purpose was a unifying factor, but ultimately it would have likely dissolved into interpersonal conflict once the original purpose was either achieved or otherwise became irrelevant. Hashem actually gave them a lasting chance at *shalom* by giving each component of the generation their own space and language.

These two aspects are the keys to giving a nation its own definition; a particular type of geography develops a certain defined skill set, and different languages to express the individual uniqueness of those nationalities. Once each nation is satisfied and comfortable with its identity, it becomes possible to appreciate other nations and nationalities. Thus, the nations can begin to see how they need each other. When there is a level of personal satisfaction among the people of a nation, the other nations are no longer viewed as a threat; in fact, they are recognized as necessary allies in order to achieve goals for the greater good. This is the very definition of *shalom*; completing each other to create a greater whole. This is true in our world, in our community, and in our homes.

This week’s *parsha* is about Hashem’s decree to flood the Earth, and what happened in the aftermath of this epic flood. Hashem commands Noach to build the *teivah* (ark) and fill it with his family and all the animals in order to save them from the flood. We thought it might interesting to contrast the *teivah* with one of the most famous ships in modern history: the RMS Titanic.

| | <i>Teivah</i> | vs. | RMS Titanic |
|----------------------|---------------|-----|-------------|
| 1) Time to Build | 120 years | | 3 years |
| 2) Construction Crew | 4 | | 15,000 |
| 3) Length | 600 feet | | 882 feet |
| 4) Width | 100 feet | | 92 feet |
| 5) Height | 60 feet | | 104 feet |
| 6) Draught | 22 feet | | 34 feet |
| 7) Decks | 3 | | 9 |
| 8) Weight | 35,741 tons | | 46,328 tons |
| 9) Length of Service | 378 days | | 5 days |

