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INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

OCTOBER 17, 2026 | ***This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe ben Bentzion, Morris Gidney. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"*** | **VOLUME 17, ISSUE 2**

6 CHESHVAN | **Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig** | **PARSHAS NOACH**

Throwing a Brick

Each man said to his friend, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them in the fire." And the brick served for them as stone and the asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens […]" (11:3-4).

At the end of this week's *parsha* we find the well known story of the Tower of Bavel, which took place at a time when many of the descendants of Noach migrated to a specific area so that they could all dwell together. They were united with a single language and a single purpose: To build a tower and commence an attack on Hashem.

Yet the Torah's description of the events is atypical. First, the Torah goes out of its way to relate the discussion of the construction process ("*let us make bricks and burn them in the fire*") and seems to needlessly elaborate on why they needed bricks in the first place (to serve in place of stone). The Torah relating these seemingly unimportant details is very curious.

Second, and even stranger, the discussion on the purpose of these bricks follows the description of making the bricks. Meaning, it is only after they start making bricks that they resolve to build a city and a tower to reach the heavens. Ordinarily, a story would begin with what is trying to be accomplished and then the process as to how the plan is implemented. However, here it seems that they only conceived of building a city and a tower after creating the construction process.

Lastly, the tower of Bavel is quite well known, but one generally doesn't hear much regarding the city of Bavel, which seems to be an integral part of the story. In fact, when Hashem descends, as it were, to see what's going on the Torah says that "*Hashem descended to see the city and the tower.*" What is this emphasis on the city?

This story, which occurred over 3,500 years ago, holds a remarkable lesson that is incredibly relevant to our times. This is the story of the onset of technology. Prior to this, man used to quarry stone or use wood to construct his home. This meant there was a constant reminder that we were living in a natural world with a Creator. The concept of being able to manufacture your own materials to construct a huge city and an accompanying tower meant that mankind had now seized power over his environment. It was this technological advance that spurred the rebellion against God. Not much has changed.

ישיבה וכולל בית משה חיים
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In the last hundred years, the world has seen significant advancements in almost every field of study and this has led to unprecedented technological innovations. From air travel to atomic bombs to vastly extending the human life expectancy, the world bears little resemblance to the thousands of years of history that were mostly technologically stagnant. Even the technological advances of the past two decades are beyond what anyone living in the mid-20th century could have ever imagined.

Yet, as we as a society continue to advance technologically, there seems to be a parallel decline and deterioration in moral values and overall "life satisfaction." What was once considered murder is now readily acceptable behavior and what was considered perverse is now deemed a life style choice. There is an ever growing population of individuals who turn to medicine, illegal drugs, or alcohol to make their lives more bearable.

Throwing a Brick Continued

Even the outwardly "most successful" individuals are often in therapy for a variety of issues. Why would the greatest advances in life lead to a less fulfilling one?

The answer is that the world has become a monument to mankind. Society has gone from being theocentric to self-centered. Technology has given mankind a "God complex" making us believe that we are in control of our destiny and we are the very focus of our existence. We have decided that the sole purpose of the world is to serve us and give us pleasure; no wonder mankind's wanton behavior has taken a terrible toll and the impact may lead to catastrophic consequences for our world.

Living in a theocentric world, a man has purpose and responsibilities outside of himself. Naturally, he will care about his family, his society, and the world at large. On the other hand, being focused on one's own pleasures naturally leads to unhappiness.

The physical world is obviously limited; likewise there is a limit to the pleasure one can achieve. The ever growing drive to derive more pleasure can be all consuming and trying to fill limitless desires with physically limited options leads inexorably to frustration. Additionally, the natural outgrowth of being primarily focused on one's own desires is that it will clash with the needs and desires of others in one's life (family, co-workers, friends, etc.).

The industrial revolution, which led to the creation of megacities that changed society from rural living to city living, directly contributed to this moral decline and self-centered attitude. Even today, middle America (which is still rural) has mostly remained religious and retained a moral compass. The coastal regions, where most of the largest US cities are located, have become much less so.

Living in a world driven by mankind's technology, we must find a way to understand and internalize that technology is only a tool to do more for our purpose in the world; to create an awareness and a palpable experience of living in a theocentric world.

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