YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Parashat Noach**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and   
Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l,   
by Debbie and David Sable

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In honor of our nephews and niece   
for their past studies at YHE and Migdal Oz - Sharon and Joel Chefitz

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**“Blessed Be the Lord, The God of Shem”**

Summarized by Hadar Horowitz

Translated by David Strauss

Immediately after the flood, we read:

And the sons of Noach, that went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Cham, and Yefet; and Cham is the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noach, and of these was the whole earth overspread. (*Bereishit* 9:18-19)

God decided to create a new world after the flood, which would be wholly the product of the three sons of Noach.

The Torah then describes in detail the descendants of each of the sons:

Now these are the generations of the sons of Noach: Shem, Cham, and Yefet; and to them were sons born after the flood. (10:1)

But between these two passages, we find the story of Noach's drunkenness:

And Noach the man of the earth began, and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Cham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Yefet took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noach awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done to him. And he said: Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers. And he said: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant. God enlarge [*yaft*] Yefet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant. (9:20-27)

Following this episode, Noach leaves the stage:

And Noach lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noach were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. (9:28-29)

This story, which describes the end of Noach's life, can be seen as a kind of testament (though it came about through a mistake) that comes to teach us about the three channels through which humanity will proceed from this point on. This is why it is placed before the account of the generations of Yefet, Cham, and Shem.

Let us try to understand how the story teaches us about the continued existence of the world:

"And Noach the man of the earth began, and planted a vineyard" — Rav Chisda said in the name of Rav Ukva, and others say that Mar Ukva said this in the name of Rabbi Zakai: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Noach: Noach, should you not have taken a warning from Adam, whose transgression was caused by wine? This agrees with the view that the [forbidden] tree from which Adam ate was a vine. For it has been taught: Rabbi Meir said: That [forbidden] tree from which Adam ate was a vine, for nothing else but wine brings woe to man. Rabbi Yehuda said: It was the wheat plant, for an infant cannot say 'father' or 'mother' until it has tasted of wheat. Rabbi Nechemya said: It was the fig tree, for with the item with which they transgressed, they made amends, as it is written: "And they sewed fig leaves together." (*Sanhedrin* 70a-70b)

God criticized Noach because he failed to learn from Adam and therefore drank wine and came to sin. This accords with the opinion that the tree of knowledge was a grapevine.

Noach was associated with Adam’s sin from the outset, when he was first named:

And he called his name Noach, saying: This same shall comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, which comes from the ground which the Lord has cursed. (5:29)

According to the Midrash, Noach invented the plow, which comforted his fellow mortals for their sadness that resulted from the toil and labor that had been decreed upon them. The generations that preceded him had seen the invention of iron and brass implements ("Tuval Kayin, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron" – 4:22); Noach made working the land much easier with the introduction of the plow. Thus it became easier to secure bread, the staple of the human diet:

And wine that makes glad the heart of man, making the face brighter than oil, and bread that stays man's heart. (*Tehillim* 104:15)

Noach's mistake was that he did not stop at facilitating the production of bread, but went on to improve the wine as well, by planting a vineyard. The verse in *Tehillim* describes wine in positive terms, as something that gladdens the heart, but Noach sinned because he drank wine. Thus, we understand the Gemara's comment that "nothing else but wine brings woe to man" (*Sanhedrin* 70b).

This dual attitude toward wine can be seen earlier on that page in the Gemara in *Sanhedrin*:

Rav Kahana raised a difficulty: The Bible writes *tirash* [for wine], but the word is read *tirosh*. If one has merit, he becomes a leader [*rosh*]; if not, he becomes impoverished [*rash*]. Rava raised a difficulty: The Bible writes: "[and wine] *yeshammach* [the heart of man]," but it is read *yesammach*. If one has merit, it gladdens him [*mesamcho*]; if not, it saddens him [*meshamemo*]. And thus Rava said: Wine and spices have made me wise. (*Sanhedrin* 70a).

On the one hand, wine opens a person's eyes, as with Rava: "Wine and spices have made me wise." Wine made him clever and led him to even greater Torah insights. In addition, there is the famous statement: "When wine enters, the secret comes out" (*Sanhedrin* 38a).

Wine can expand a person's mind when it is drunk properly. On the other hand, drinking too much wine is liable to lead a person to stumble and cause him to sin. A large portion of our community stumbles because of excessive drinking, including our youth. I personally recommend staying as far away from it as possible.

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Let us go back to the verses that describe the story of Noach's drunkenness:

"And Noach the man of the earth began [*vayachel*], and planted a vineyard." (9:1)

This verse can be understood in two ways:

"*Vayachel*" in the sense of beginning – after disembarking from the ark, Noach began with the planting of a vineyard. Another way to understand the word is *"vayachel*" in the sense of profane. Noach sinned with the planting of the vineyard.

As the story continues, the verses differentiate between Cham,who represents the barbarism that exists in the world, and Shem and Yefet, who represent culture.

There is a certain ambiguity in the verses. On the one hand, it is written: "And Cham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside." From this it seems that Cham sinned only with his seeing. Later, it seems that he did something much more severe: "And Noach awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son **had done to him**." In fact, *Chazal* discuss which terrible act Cham did:

Rav and Shemuel disagreed. One said: He castrated him; the other said: He sexually abused him. (*Sanhedrin* 70a)

Even if Cham had sinned only through seeing his father's nakedness, his action would have been serious. Every person in the world understands that looking at a naked person is an uncultured and unworthy act. Even more troubling is a son who does not understand the importance of the respect that must be shown to the source from which he was born, the nakedness of his father. A person who does not appreciate the place from which he emerged is a barbarian. But *Chazal* teach us that Cham's action went even beyond that, a sin connected to forbidden sexual relations.

Cham is twice described in these verses as "Cham the father of Canaan." This is difficult, for in the following verses, Cham is described as having several other sons.

And the sons of Cham were: Kush, and Mitzrayim, and Put, and Canaan. (*Bereishit* 10:6)

It seems that Cham is described here specifically as the father of Canaan because his action represents the direction in which the seed of Canaan (and also of Mitzrayim) will go in the future. Before the passage in the book of *Vayikra* that lists forbidden sexual relationships, we encounter the warning:

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, shall you not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, shall you not do; neither shall you walk in their statutes. (*Vayikra* 18:3)

At the end of that chapter, after spelling out all of the sexual prohibitions:

**For all these abominations have the men of the land done, that were before you,** and the land is defiled - that the land vomit not you out also, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (*Vayikra* 18:27-28)

"The men of the land that were before you" are obviously the people of Canaan, as we read in next week’s *parasha*:

And Avram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the terebinth of Moreh. **And the Canaanite was then in the land.** (*Bereishit* 12:6)

In contrast to Cham, Shem and Yefet protect the modesty of their father, but there seems to be a difference even between them:

"And Shem and Yefet took [*vayikach*] a garment" – It is not written here *vayikechu* [in the plural], but rather *vayikach* [in the singular]. This teaches that Shem exerted himself in the *mitzva* more than did Yefet… (Rashi, *Bereishit* 9:23)

On one level, there is a difference in the reward that each received, based on their respective efforts. (“According to the effort is the reward” – *Avot* 5:23.) But it seems that the distinction between them goes deeper:

And he said: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant. God enlarge [*yaft*] Yefet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant. (9:26-27)

It is true that Yefet is praised, but Shem is given a much more important designation: The Lord is the God of Shem.

Yefet seems to set beauty (*yofi*)and aesthetics at the center; he covers his father's nakedness because it is not seemly or aesthetic that it be revealed. He represents the perception that a person should have dignity and splendor. In the past, Greek culture expressed this, with its worship of beauty and the body. Today, it is Western culture that represents this idea.

The main question that stood and stands before them is: How can one reach that which is most seemly and beautiful?

The problem with such a worldview is that there are no absolute values. The question is just what is more beautiful and pleasant, and therefore there are no limits or values to which a person is subject and committed. In this perspective, any action that a person performs is legitimate.

Shem, on the other hand, represents a conception of *avodat Hashem*, service of God. He symbolizes the perception that there are absolute values in the world, and above all – "the Lord, the God of Shem." Shem covers his father's nakedness because he understands that modesty is an absolute value in itself. Therefore, even if Noach's sons did not see him naked, there would have been a problem with their father's nakedness. A person must maintain modesty, by virtue of the very fact that he lives in God's world. This is what we are taught by the prophet Mikha:

It has been told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk modestly with your God. (*Mikha* 6:8)

Unfortunately, the discourse in the Beit Midrash today on modesty is almost exclusively in relation to dress. We must understand that the clothes that a person wears are only part of the value of modesty: a person must be modest in his attitude towards those around him, in his behavior, in his eating, and even in his Torah innovations.

When a person understands that "You have made him but little lower than the angels" (*Tehillim* 8:6) is said about him, and that the little that differentiates between him and God is significant, he can behave and move forward based on the understanding that he is living in the world of God. About such a person it is fitting to apply the verse: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem."

[This *sicha* was delivered at *seuda shelishit* on Shabbat *Parashat Noach* 5779 (2018).]