



Yeshivat Har Etzion – Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest, Year IV, #7 Parashat Noach 5782

Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Prior to the Flood, Noach lived in an evil, corrupt environment.... Despite this, Noach managed to remain righteous; he was unaffected by what went on around him.... The knowledge that his opinion was unusual and special only amplified his sense of mission and obligation, helping guard him from the pressures of his surroundings and helping him distinguish between good and evil.

After the Flood, the situation was altogether different. Noach was no longer unusual; he was now alone. Before him lay the huge task of rehabilitating the world. There was no choice here between good and evil; rather, he faced a choice between one good and another.... Here he had to stand up only to himself, and in this he failed. Instead of seeing to the most elementary, essential infrastructure, he planted a vineyard and became drunk...

Sometimes we suffer from the same problem: we know how to guard ourselves and deal with outside elements that declare themselves opposed to all that is dear to us, but we are not always successful in grappling with our own nature: in using our time properly, in setting proper priorities and limits. Noach's downfall should teach us to devote careful attention to this battle, too.

-Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l

Parashat Noach The Sin of the Builders of the Tower of Babel

By Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-noach/noach-sin-builders-tower-babel>

Our parasha describes the actions of the generation that built the Tower of Babel, as well as the punishment meted out to them. At first it is difficult to understand why God was angered by their actions. Is the desire to band together and to live as a single, unified society really so odious?

The gemara (Sanhedrin 109a) explains that the sin of this generation lay in their construction of the tower. Three different explanations are offered for this initiative: "They (the people) were divided into 3 groups: one declared, 'We shall go up [to Heaven] and dwell there.' The second declared, 'We shall go up and worship other gods.' The third declared, 'We shall go up and wage war.'"

It is important to understand the differences between these groups of builders, all of whom were jointly building the tower, and the specific sin represented by each approach.

As we know, one of the foundations of faith is the constant dialectic between love and awe. On the one hand, a person must strive to come close to God and "cleave" to Him; he must not remain a "bystander." At the same time, excessive closeness is not desirable, and may have terrible consequences: "Anyone who draws close to God's Sanctuary will be put to death." The first group described by the Gemara expresses the desire to dispense with the aspect of awe in their relationship with God; they want to move directly and exclusively to a relationship of love and closeness: "We shall go up and we shall dwell there."

Today, too, there are religions that seek a connection with God that is built on love alone. Examples include not only certain eastern religions but other religions too, and we are well aware of the immoral and murderous actions to which such an approach may lead.

The second group wanted to build the tower in order to facilitate idolatrous worship. The foundation of idolatry is the belief in powers that are outside of and separate from God. Even the nations of the world know that there is one central God Who stands above all the other deities that they believe in. However, as Rambam explains at the beginning of Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim, the problem with the idolaters is that they feel that God is so great, so transcendent and distant, that they have no connection with Him. Therefore, they prefer to worship forces which are admittedly "lower," but which – for that precise reason – are more accessible, and

to which one can feel closer. Thus, the sin of the second group was their belief that there are forces other than God, and their attempt to worship them rather than their Creator.

The third group sought to “wage war.” Apparently, this group believed that just as there are wars in our lower world, so there are also wars in the upper realms, in God’s domain. The Gemara in Sanhedrin goes on to describe how the punishment for this group was that “they became monkeys and spirits and demons and fiends.” The Gemara seems to be teaching that their punishment was “measure for measure”: the people who believed that the upper world is just like the lower world turned into caricatures of the ministering angels, in the form of spirits and demons. The upper world is not a material realm; it is a world of spirit. Therefore, there are no wars there, as we experience them in our world. The people who viewed themselves as belonging to the upper world became part of that spiritual world – but instead of becoming angels, they assumed the form of the “lower” spirits and demons.

Through this narrative, the Torah lays the groundwork for Parashat Lekh-Lekha and all that is to come. In contrast to these mistaken, misguided perceptions of Divinity in the world, we find Avraham appearing on the scene afterwards. He answers God’s call, “Go forth,” and begins disseminating the religion of truth.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Noach 5748 [1987]. Translated by Kaeren Fish)

Parashat Noach Creation Anew

By Rav Zeev Weitman

Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-noach/noach-creation-anew>



1. The Flood was Intended to Erase the World

The purpose of the Flood, as described at the end of Parashat Bereishit, was to erase life from the face of the earth – in fact, to erase all of Creation (Bereishit 6:6-7): “And God repented of having made mankind upon the earth, and was grieved to His heart. And God said, ‘I will blot out mankind which I created from upon the face of the earth – both man, and beast, and creeping things, and the birds of the sky, for I repent of having made them.’”

God does not bring the Flood to annihilate the wicked sinners while leaving the righteous at peace in the world. Rather, He regrets having created man at all. Thus, His decision is that mankind should be erased from the face of the earth – a final, absolute blotting out. The plain meaning of the text indicates that the original plan was to annihilate humanity along with all forms of life from the face of the earth, “for I repent of having made them.” Since the 6 days of Creation were meant to prepare the world for the creation of man, the meaning of the decision to blot out man is that the world is returned to its state prior to the 6 days of Creation – one of void and chaos.

Surprisingly, the text asserts that God’s initial plan was carried out in full (7:23):

And He blotted out all life that was upon the face of the earth – both man and cattle, and creeping things and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth; there remained only Noach and those that were with him in the Ark.

If we were to stop reading here, we might conclude that the decision to wipe out mankind is perfectly matched by its execution. All life is wiped out and the world returns to a state remarkably similar to that which existed prior to the 6 days of Creation, a time of void and chaos. Once again, as in the beginning, the world is covered in water. Analyzing God’s promise after the Flood – “Summer and winter and day and night will not cease” – led Chazal to conclude that what had ceased during the Flood was not just what God had created on the third, fifth, and sixth days, but also that which had been created on the first day (day and night) and the fourth day (the heavenly luminaries). Since God’s work of the second day – the firmament that separated water from water – was certainly wiped out by the Flood, we conclude that all the work of the 6 days of Creation was nullified, with the world returned to a state of void and chaos.

All of Creation was blotted out from upon the earth, and even Noach did not remain on the earth, but rather floated in the Ark. He joins the spirit of God that hovers, as in the beginning, over the face of the water, over the face of the earth which is covered in water, which has returned to its primordial state of void and chaos from prior to the 6 days of Creation.

When God decides to destroy the world, we are told, “But Noach found favor in God’s eyes....” Moreover, when Noach enters the Ark, he takes a male and female of every type of animal. However, neither of these facts necessarily means that God’s plan was to wipe out the sinners while leaving Noach in the world, establishing a new world through him, as indeed ultimately happens.

The fact that Noach finds favor in God’s eyes does not negate the decision to blot out the world and annihilate it. It is possible that the point of having Noach and specimens of living things enter the Ark was not so that the world could be recreated through them, but rather to deliver them from the punishment that had been decreed for the world and all living things. Perhaps Noach is placed in the Ark, preserving the

memory of the world that has been blotted out, so that the Ark can serve Noah as a miniature universe in which he is destined to spend the rest of his life. Thus, human life upon earth could have ultimately come to its end, with the Ark floating upon the water, serving as a monument to the world that was no more.

2. The Decision to Create the World Anew

The objective of the Flood was seemingly not achieved. The world was not blotted out, and man continues to stand at its center. Why wasn't the original plan carried out? Why didn't God erase man from the face of the earth? In light of this, the fact that we are living in the world and that Noah's Ark was not left floating on the water is not because God did not execute His original plan, but rather because God decided to create a new world – apparently one that would be different from its predecessor.

This Divine decision to create the world anew misleads us into thinking that the Flood did not fulfill its original purpose or that God's original intention was to blot out only the sinners, while leaving the world and all of Creation intact and to continue it from Noah.

The decision to create the world anew is hinted at in the similarity between the Creation of the world with Adam and the story of the "creation anew" with Noah, as we shall see below.

The verse, "And God remembered Noah and every living thing and all the beasts that were with him in the Ark" does not necessarily indicate that the original plan was to continue the world from Noah and his progeny and the animals with them. It is possible that their mention here indicates a new decision by God to create a new world for Noah. Hence, the meaning could parallel the meaning of "remembrance" in the verses, "And God remembered Rachel" or "And God remembered Abraham and He sent Lot forth from amidst the upheaval."

The order of the original Creation was that first there was light and day (1st day), then land (2nd-3rd day), vegetation (3rd day), living creatures (5th-6th days), and man (6th day). Now, again, the world is "created," first with the water gradually subsiding and the tops of the mountains appearing. Then the raven flies about "until the waters were dried up," and the dove brings evidence that vegetation is once again growing. Finally, the animals emerge from the Ark, with man's foot touching the ground of the world that has been prepared for him.

As following the first Creation, so too after the second creation both man and beast are blessed to "be fruitful and multiply," and once again man is given dominion over the animal kingdom. Adam was told, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea," while Noah is told, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the sky." The fact that the animals, along with man, are blessed again to be fruitful and that man is once again given dominion over the animals may be the clearest indication that this is a new creation, not a continuation of the old one. For if this was a continuation of the same world after the annihilation of the sinners, what need is there for a new blessing and a restatement of man's power over all living things?

Man's diet, which originally included only plants, is now extended to include meat. Corresponding to the original warning – "from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it," Noah is now commanded, "But flesh with its life, which is its blood, you shall not eat."

3. The Story of Noah's Drunkenness

Is the re-creation of the world more successful than the original Creation? Is the new world better and more refined than its predecessor? The answer seems to be negative: man returns to his old ways. His evil inclination, which brought about God's initial decision to blot out the world – "All the impulse of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually" – remains even after the Flood: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Indeed, no sooner does Noah emerge from the Ark than we read of his drunkenness, his uncovering of himself, and the sin of his son. We read later of the sin of the generation that rebels and builds the Tower of Babel. Seemingly, nothing has changed. Man remains as he was, continuing in his rebellious ways.

However, it is specifically the story of Noah's drunkenness, which seems like a mere appendix to the story of the Flood, that points to the basic difference between the original Creation and the new creation. Just after the first Creation is complete, we find that Adam sins. Similarly, Noah sins right after the second creation. What might be perceived as a similarity between the first sin (eating of the Tree of Knowledge) and the second (drinking of the fruit of the vine), turns out, upon closer inspection, to shed light on what is different about the second creation.

Noah, the man of the ground who experiences the re-creation of the world, imitates Adam and tries to go back to the Garden of Eden. He plants a vineyard and drinks of its fruits, thereby "repairing," as it were, the original sin of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge amidst the Garden. Adam's eating of the fruit of the Tree gave him knowledge and the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and he hurriedly covers his nakedness. Noah, in contrast, loses his ability to distinguish and is found naked in his tent. The return to the Garden of Eden from before the sin is now complete. Noah appears to have turned the wheels of history back to the

days of Adam in the Garden of Eden, prior to his sin.

Cham, who comes upon his naked father, is amazed at the return to the “Garden of Eden” and hurries to tell his brothers the news. However, unlike their brother, Shem and Yefet understand that this is not progress, but rather a dangerous regression. Shem and Yefet understand that, unlike the previous world, the present world is adapted to mankind that distinguishes between good and evil, and in this new world man is “created” with his nakedness covered. That which had previously been natural and positive – “And both of them were naked, and they were not ashamed” – now becomes shameful and unacceptable. In this new world, there is no place for uncovering nakedness; it must be covered, just as God did immediately after Adam’s sin.

Noah, who understands the change, knows what his youngest son has done. He understands that in the new world, sexual immorality is deserving of condemnation, and he curses his son in a manner that is reminiscent of God’s curse to Adam – but this time for the opposite act. Adam brought about the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and the covering of nakedness, while Cham seeks to be rid of the ability to distinguish between good and evil and to expose nakedness. Adam wipes the sweat from his brow in tilling the ground, and Cham will wipe the sweat from his own brow as he labors as “a slave of slaves to his brothers.” Noah understands that what his youngest son has done should be cursed; there is no place for him in the new world.

Here we discover the change that has taken place in the new world. That which was worthy of being cursed in the original Creation is now deserving of blessing, while that which had been an ideal in the previous world is now cursed. In the original Creation, man was created naked and his dressing in coats of skins following the sin was not sufficient for the “bnei ha-elohim,” who sinned with human women, bringing about the blotting out of man from the face of the earth. In Noah’s world, man (Noah) starts clothed, such that he understands that gazing upon nakedness in this world is negative – an act that had brought about the Flood – and so it must be denounced and eradicated.

All of Creation was wiped out because of its corruption, and the creation of the world anew is meant to repair the defects of its predecessor. This new creation is adapted to man’s dimensions and character after the sin – and man steps into this new world for the first time, clothed. This fact indicates a turning point and progress. Noah understands that in the new world, sexual immorality is cursed. This represents the hope that this new world will endure for longer than the previous one. Translated by Kaeren Fish

Avodat Hashem – Foundations of Divine Service

Shiur #37 – Torah Study 11:

The Crown of Torah and the Crown of a Good Name

By Harav Baruch Gigi



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/practical-issues-philosophy/torah-study-11-crown-torah-and-crown>

I. The Crown of a Good Name

We discussed previously the concept of a crown and the nature of each crown mentioned in the mishna in Avot. We will now explore the superiority of the crown of Torah over the other crowns, in light of the Rambam’s opinion (based on the Gemara in Yoma).

Last week we presented that the superiority of the crown of Torah over the other 2 crowns stems from it being a personal crown. One achieves this crown through effort and hard work, while the crowns of royalty and priesthood result from lineage. As stated, these crowns express Israel’s national connection to God, with the crown representing the entire people.

Let us now examine the relationship between the crowns based on the various commentators. But first, let us consider another crown that appears in the fourth chapter of tractate Avot. The mishna states: “Rabbi Shimon said: There are 3 crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but the crown of a good name excels them all.” This mishna opens with 3 crowns but it concludes with a fourth. Why doesn’t the mishna state that “there are 4 crowns” from the outset?

II. The Crown of a Good Name Stems from the Crown of Torah

Let us open with the Rambam’s commentary to the Mishna. The Rambam bases the superiority of the crown of Torah on the verse in Mishlei (8:15-16) which states: “By me [= the Torah] kings reign... by me princes rule...” The crowns of royalty and priesthood both need the Torah. Kings rule and priests serve before God by virtue of the Torah, which guides their paths as they govern the people.

Thus it is stated regarding worldly governance (Devarim 17:18-20): “And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah in a book... And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life...”

So that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.”

And thus it is stated regarding spiritual governance (Devarim 18:3-5): “And this shall be the priest’s law from the people... For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever.”

Kings rule, and priests serve in the Temple, in the name of the Torah. This makes clear that the crown of the Torah exceeds the 2 others, as it stands on its own and supports the other 2 crowns.

The Rambam attributes the crown of a good name to the crown of Torah as well. He sees the crown of a good name as expressing the esteem that the bearer of the crown of Torah earns through his study: “But the crown of a good name comes from the Torah... from its study and its observance, for that leads to a truly good name” (Mishna Commentary, Avot 4:13). According to the Rambam, the crown of a good name is the crown of Torah itself. One acquires the crown of a good name by studying and observing the Torah.

Rabbeinu Yona also sees the crown of a good name as dependent upon and stemming from the crown of Torah, from which it radiates onto the other crowns. Rabbeinu Yona attributes the superiority of the crown of Torah to 3 elements:

1. The crown of Torah connects a person to God in the most elevated manner.
2. The crown of Torah is not limited to specific people or communities.
3. Only by virtue of the crown of Torah can one achieve the other crowns.

In tractate Yoma (72b), Rabbi Yochanan links the various crowns to the vessels in the Temple, linking the priestly crown to the altar, the royal crown to the table and the crown of the Torah to the ark.

The superiority of the crown of Torah is asserted here as being represented by the ark that rests in the Holy of Holies, while the other 2 crowns are represented by the altar and the table, both of which rest in the outer Holy region. This means that the crown of Torah connects a person to God on the highest level. This crown creates the intimate encounter in the Holy of Holies, that of the keruvim covering the kaporet (the crown of the ark) with their wings. These keruvim express the intense bond symbolized by the Midrash: “See how cherished you are before the Omnipresent” (Yoma 54a).

Another difference between the resting of the Shekhina through the crowns of priesthood and royalty and the crown of Torah relates to who can acquire this crown. The former crowns are limited to restricted groups of people, based on the rules of kings and priests. The Shekhina reaches earthly reality through these rules.

The crown of Torah, on the other hand, is not limited to one family or framework, and regarding it, it is stated: “In all places where I cause My name to be pronounced, I will come to you, and I will bless you” (Shemot 20:21). The resting of the Shekhina and the bond to God achieved through Torah study is direct, needing no mediation.

What is more, the crown of a good name is a necessary condition for donning the crown that God gave to kings and priests, His representatives to lead His people. God only assigns His name to and crowns those with a good name. As Rabbeinu Yona explains, the crown of a good name depends upon the crown of Torah and on occupying oneself with the mitzvot. In this way the crown of the Torah surpasses the other crowns, for only by virtue of the crown of the Torah can the kings and the priests wear their crowns.

III. The Crown of a Good Name is the Full Realization of the Crown

The Maharal of Prague in *Derekh ha-Chayyim* addresses the crowns at great length. We will highlight some of his central ideas as they relate to what we have outlined here.

According to the Maharal, each crown expresses man’s recognition of the unique value expressed by that crown. One who wishes to acquire the crown of priesthood, for example, must internalize the great value of taking spiritual responsibility for his surroundings. He must work tirelessly to fulfill his mission, his responsibility and the position of spiritual leadership which he occupies, as the Torah states (Bemidbar 16:9): “The God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the service of the Mishkan of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them.”

When the priest achieves this level, the crown of priesthood is not merely placed upon his head representing a mission that he accepts upon himself. The crown becomes an integral part in his personality, a crown of “a good name,” reflecting his very essence.

According to the Maharal, this is the meaning of the statement that the crown of a good name rises above the other crowns, as it expresses the actualization and essential bond between the crown and its bearer.

A person can don the crown of royalty even if he is not a king in his essence. One can also wear the crown of Torah without being worthy of that crown. Only one who identifies with his crown to the point that he and his crown are one, by identifying with the

essential value represented by the crown, is a true bearer of that crown. This is called “the crown of a good name.”

Since our focus is the crown of Torah, let us apply this to that crown. It is not enough for one to occupy himself with Torah and to seek to understand its vastness. One who wishes to acquire the crown of Torah must aspire to fully identify with the Torah’s values.

A Torah scholar who has a problematic reputation does not wear the crown of Torah (see Sefer Chasidim 43). As we have explained, the crown of Torah is the profound connection with God, Giver of the Torah. Thus, a person does not bear the crown of Torah unless the crown of a good name rises above it. This latter crown expresses the person’s thorough identification with its value, such that the crown becomes the person’s good name.

Here too, the crown of Torah is greater than the crowns of priesthood and royalty. While regarding the other crowns, too, one wearing the crown should identify with the inner ideas of royalty and priesthood, the deficiency of not identifying with one’s role as God’s agent in the political or spiritual governance of His people, fulfilling his mission only for the sake of his people, is not as severe. One who wears the crown of Torah, the direct crown of God, without fully identifying with what it represents, is more problematic.

Note that the deficiency in wearing a crown without internalizing and identifying with the idea and with the connection to the Divine idea in the crown, is critical; it creates a barrier between the bearer of the crown and the King of the world who crowned him. However, the force of the deficiency is greatest in the case of the crown of the Torah. This is because the essence of Torah study is man’s self-effacement before the word of God, absorbing the Divine wisdom and turning it into an essential part of his personality.

IV. The Crown of a Good Name is the Fear of Heaven

In his Chidushei Aggadot on tractate Yoma (72b), the Maharsha offers a different explanation of the crown of a good name. He explains that the crown of a good name is the fear of God which must accompany each of the other crowns. The Maharsha emphasizes that failure on the part of a priest or a king leads to rejection from priesthood or royalty. In contrast, with respect to failure concerning Torah, there is no room to speak of rejection, but only of total destruction.

V. A Mamzer Who is a Torah Scholar Takes Precedence Over the Ignorant High Priest

In tractate Horayot (13a) it is taught:

A priest takes precedence over a Levite, a Levite over an Israelite, an Israelite over a mamzer, a mamzer over a natin, a natin over a proselyte, and a proselyte over an emancipated slave. This order of precedence applies only when all these were in other respects equal. If the mamzer, however, was a Torah scholar and the High Priest an ignoramus, the learned mamzer takes precedence over the ignorant High Priest.

This mishna, which establishes an order of precedence for the purpose of rescue, creates a hierarchy based on personal sanctity and noble lineage. Thus, a priest is the most sanctified, whereas an emancipated slave is the furthest from such sanctity.

However, alongside this assertion, the mishna emphasizes that this order is not valid, and is even reversed, in the case of a person who distinguished and sanctified himself. One who immerses himself in Torah and its merits acquires spiritual standing that is higher than the personal sanctity of the High Priest.

That is how one can understand the Gemara’s derivation as well (Horayot 13a), which learn from a verse that Torah study “is more precious than rubies” (Mishlei 3:15), explaining that “it is more precious than the High Priest who enters into the innermost sanctuary.”

Based on this, in Hilkhhot Talmud Torah (3:2) after explaining the matter of the crowns, the Rambam codifies this Gemara, demonstrating the superiority of the crown of Torah to the crown of priesthood: “Our Sages said that even a Torah scholar who is a mamzer takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest...”

We see then that the derasha of Chazal emphasizes the gap between the crowns even more. This is not only with the relationship between intellectual and physical virtue, as posited by the Maharal. This Midrash compares the Torah scholar who is a mamzer to the ignorant High Priest, against the background of the encounter with the Shekhina.

The High Priest who enters the innermost sanctuary, to see and to be seen by God, does not compare to a Torah scholar. Thus, even if the Torah scholar is a mamzer, he merits to remain in the company of the Giver of the Torah in the highest state of communion and connection. As the Zohar states (Vayikra, Acharei-Mot, 73a-b): “Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one.”

(Translated by David Strauss)

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