



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Noach

October 23, 2020

A Taste of Torah

Change in the Weather

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

The Talmud (Chagiga 16a) cites Rav Yosef who says that it is better to have never been born than to stare at a rainbow. Since the image of the rainbow in the clouds is reminiscent of the Divine presence, staring at it is disrespectful, as if one were staring at the Divine Presence itself. This is a strong statement to make for what seems to be a fairly minor crime. The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels; 1555-1631) in Tractate Kiddushin (40a) explains that who lacks respect for his Creator is missing the most basic reason for his own existence, as the verse in Proverbs (16:4) says the purpose of Creation is to bring glory to the Creator. Someone who does not appreciate the purpose of his existence does not deserve to have ever been born.

Still, this passage of the Talmud requires further explanation. What does the rainbow have to do with the Divine? Furthermore, in this week's parsha we learn that the rainbow was placed as the sign that Hashem will never bring another flood to destroy the world. Why should this symbol be reminiscent of the Divine presence?

There is another basic question about the rainbow. The Torah indicates that the rainbow first appeared following the Flood as a sign that Hashem would never again bring a Flood that would destroy the entire world. But a rainbow is a naturally occurring phenomenon that would have ostensibly occurred since the laws of nature came into existence during Creation!

Rav Meir Leibush Wisser (1809-1879), better known as the Malbim, explains, based on his interpretation of the verses earlier in the parsha, that prior to the Flood, the Earth's axis was straight, and its orbit was circular rather than elliptical. Because of this, the entire world had one temperate climate with no seasons. In addition, he says, rain was very rare. On the occasions that it did rain, heavy clouds would gather around the whole globe at once. The

ensuing deep soaking rain provided long-lasting moisture in the ground which, together with the steady temperate climate, ensured that the ground could produce food until the next rain. The fruits grew bigger and were more nutritious as well. The steady, pleasant climate and enriched food produced strong people who lived longer and healthier lives.

The purpose of this wonderful world and stress-free life was to provide humanity a great degree of freedom from worry and preoccupation so as to be free to serve Hashem.

Instead, humanity corrupted these gifts and began using this semi-utopian existence as a means to all types of depravity. Hashem brought the Flood as punishment and, in the process, altered the axis and orbit of the earth, ending this utopian era. Now people would live with climates and seasons that do not produce such bounty, necessitating that people engage in regular labor and maintenance to provide for themselves, essentially eliminating the leisure and wholesomeness mankind previously enjoyed. This limited people's capacity to sin by limiting the time they had at their disposal and weakening their physical condition. This also helped to curtail the effect of the sin since people could not commit a sin with the same vivaciousness as before.

Along with these atmospheric changes that weakened the physical world, the system of precipitation changed. Now there are climates, seasons, and weather systems that are local, not global. A rainbow can only appear if the sky is covered by clouds on one side and the sun is shining into the clouds from the clear sky on the other side. This never happened before the Flood because when it rained, the clouds were always thick and fully covering the entire sky. Only after the Flood does the possibility of having a sky partially covered by clouds exist.

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Stories for the Soul

Raining Success - or Destruction

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman studied in the Yeshiva of Long Beach in his youth. Every year, during the days leading up to Purim, the student body would devote part of the day to raising funds for Torah study in *Eretz Yisrael*. Students were divided into groups, and they traveled across the United States as they raised \$1 million to support the study of Torah in the Holy Land.

The year of the start of the Great Recession, many people cut back on their usual annual donation due to financial setbacks and hardships. However, one man visited by Chaim Yeshia and his friends actually increased his contribution! He explained that he, too, had been affected negatively by the financial crisis, but the rov of his synagogue, Rabbi Avraham Schorr, had recently spoken about the worldwide recession and had given a parable:

A wealthy man wished to garner some attention for himself, so he went to the top of a tall skyscraper and began tossing hundred dollar bills to the ground below. People, seeing money raining from the sky, snatched up the money and went on their way with nary a glance to the source of the beneficence. Seeing that the sought-after attention was not forthcoming, the man tried tossing single dollar bills from the building, but people reacted the same way. Finally, the man took pebbles and began dropping them from the roof. This time, people looked up to see who was throwing rocks down upon them. Finally, the man received the attention he wanted!

When G-d bestows the world with success, people tend to grab the goodness without "looking up" to see and realize its source. In order to get our attention, said Rabbi Schorr, G-d must sometimes toss pebbles and rocks upon us so that we will look up and pay attention!

"And that is why," concluded the man,

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Kollel Happenings

TORAH FOR TYCOONS VIA ZOOM ON NOV. 4

Torah for Tycoons resumes on Wed., Nov. 4 via Zoom. Join Jonathan Fleisher Esq., Principal at Law Offices of Jonathan Fleisher, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for *Additional Charges May Apply: Liability for COVID-19 Transmission*. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: What should be on one's table, even if not being used?

Answer: Salt. The table upon which one eats is compared to the *Mizbe'ach* (Altar), and the food one eats is compared to a *korban* (sacrifice). The Torah mandates that

salt be placed upon a *korban*, and so salt should be on the table before one begins eating. This protects from punishment (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 167:5).

This week's question: Where is triple-dipping a good thing to do?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part XXVI

Rabbi Menashe ben Israel does not fit the classic model of a great Torah leader. However, he was a great Torah scholar who taught many students. His scholarship, brilliance and erudition in Torah, coupled with his great concern for his brethren, put him in a position to have great influence and impact in the

Jewish world through his efforts to gain admission for Jews into England. Though during his lifetime he believed that this mission had failed, as formal admission was not granted, his efforts did open the door for Jews to return to England in larger and larger numbers as time progressed.

A Taste of Torah

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The decline of the physical world that was necessary to limit Mankind from reaching a level of evil that would require a Flood to punish it is the very reason that rainbows now naturally appear. Thus, the rainbow is a reminder that there will never again be a Flood.

At the same time, the deterioration of the physical world is meant to allow the spiritual reality of the world to rise. A less-predictable and more labor-intensive world means people can have a greater awareness of Divine involvement in the world. This new reality would also help ensure that Mankind would not reach the depths of depravity that would trigger world-wide destruction.

This is also included in the symbolism of the rainbow. White light from the sun contains the entire spectrum of colors within. When it passes through clouds, the drops of water act as prism which refracts the light into the

seven colors of the rainbow. In a similar fashion, the light of Hashem, when passing through the spiritual worlds down to our world, does not split into more nuanced emanations. However, when that Divine light of Hashem is passed through a refined human being who has been developed through Torah and mitzvos, one can observe seven facets of Hashem's interaction with the world, known as the seven *sefiros*. The *tzaddik*, or righteous individual, reflects Hashem's Divine attributes through his own actions.

It emerges that the rainbow does, in fact, represent Hashem's Presence in this world, and it is inappropriate to stare at the rainbow.

The rainbow teaches us many lessons about properly utilizing the goodness Hashem gives us in this world, and the consequences of missing it. May we all merit to properly learn those lessons.

Stories for the Soul

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"I am increasing my donation to your cause this year. I want to be sure to respond to G-d's wake-up call."

In Parsha Noach, G-d sends messages and warnings to the people of Noach's time, both

through Noach himself and other methods, to call their attention to their errant ways. When they ignored these calls for improvement, they sealed their fate and were destroyed by the Flood.

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