

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Rochel *bas* Isser *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Why a Flood?

## PARSHAS NO'ACH 5778

One of the main episodes of this week's *parshah*, of course, is the virtual destruction of the world, as its inhabitants – save the survivors on the *teivah* (ark) – were engulfed by the waters of the Mabul (Flood).

### Root Causes

The causes that triggered this cataclysmic event are delineated by the Torah, with *chamas* (petty thievery) apparently the principal culprit: ... ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס... – “And the land was corrupted before G-d, and the land was filled with *chamas*... And G-d said to No'ach: ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the land is filled with *chamas* from their presence; and behold, I am readying to destroy them with the land’” (*Bereishis* 6:11,13).

The *Tzror Ha'mor* points out, however, that there seems to be a missing factor here. Granted, the wickedness of mankind may have reached proportions that warranted their destruction: וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ – “And Hashem saw that the wickedness of man on the earth had become great” (*Ibid.* v. 5). The question that arises relates to the *specific method of their removal*. As we know, Divine Justice operates according to the principle of “*middah k'negged middah* – measure for measure,” whereby the mode of punishment corresponds to the nature of the crime. Chazal express this notion specifically with regard to death by water; as the Mishnah states (*Avos* 2:6):

אף הוא ראה גלגלת אחת שצפה על פני המים, אמר לה על דאטפת אטפוד, וסוף מטיפיד יטפון.

“Even he (Hillel) saw a solitary skull floating upon the surface of the water. He remarked to it: ‘You have been drowned because you have (apparently) drowned others; and the fate of those who drowned you will be that they themselves will be drowned.’”

The *Tzror Ha'mor*, then, is somewhat perplexed. There was no shortage of methods to dispose of the *Dor Ha'mabul*; wild animals, pestilence, or any other manner of elimination could have been employed. What was it about the sin of the *Dor Ha'mabul* (Generation of the Flood) that resulted in their demise by flood? This question leads him to deduce that there must have been another aspect, perhaps not stated so explicitly in the narrative, to the guilt of that society.

There were other factors, as well, that led the *Tzror Ha'mor* to this conclusion. Notable among them is the Torah's curious emphasis, throughout this narrative, on the words “the earth.” These words are mentioned repeatedly, often in places where they seemingly could have been omitted. For example, above was cited the verse: וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ – “And Hashem saw that the wickedness of man **on the earth** had become great.” Obviously, his wickedness took place “on the earth” – it couldn't have happened in the atmosphere! And later: וימח את כל היקום... מאדם עד בהמה... וימחו מן הארץ – “And He wiped out all existence... from man unto beast... and they were exterminated **from the earth**” (*Ibid.* 7:23). And so on. On a related note, it is likewise intriguing that the earth itself seems to have shared in the punishment meted out to the *Dor Ha'mabul*, as it was totally decimated by the Flood;– Rashi (6:13) remarks that a full three handbreadths of the earth's surface were washed away.

What all of this points to, asserts the *Tzror Ha'mor*, is that the sin of the *Dor Ha'mabul* seems to have involved the *earth itself*.

### Return to Creation

Specifically, he explains, it appears that they fell prey to the temptation that tends to arise from a life of ease and plenty. Citing the Medrashim, he portrays the idyllic conditions that existed on the earth at that time; for example, they would sow their seeds in one season, and the earth would continue to yield produce for years to come. Now, the Torah warns often of a dangerous attitude that could develop in such circumstances; as it states, for example: ...וַיִּשְׂמְנוּ וַיִּבְעֲטוּ... וַיִּטְשׁוּ אֶל־לוֹקֵי עֲשָׂהוּ – “And they grew fat... and defied... and abandoned the G-d Who made them” (*Devarim 32:15*). In other words, the *Dor Ha'mabul's* sin consisted of their secularization; they effectively became believers in the natural world, denying Hashem's role in Creation and attributing everything to “Nature.”

And so, in reaction – *middah k'negged middah* – Hashem decimated the natural world and order that this generation had so exalted. Chazal go so far as to state that for the duration of the *Mabul*, the heavenly luminaries ceased to function. In any event, explains the *Tzror Ha'mor*, the other key aspect of the *Dor Ha'mabul's* sin consisted of outright *kefirah* (heresy), as they denied Hashem's Creation and idolized nature instead. And so Hashem unleashed the floodwaters; thereby, the world was restored to its pre-Creation state of “*tohu va'vohu* – astonishing emptiness” (*Bereishis1:2*), during which *the entire planet was submerged in water* (until Hashem declared: “Let the waters be gathered... and the land shall be exposed” [*Ibid.* v. 9]).

Thus we find, interestingly enough, that the post-*Mabul* recovery parallels the Creation narrative in a number of respects. The *Mabul* came to an end through a G-dly wind: וַיִּזְכֹּר – אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל־הַחַיָּה וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם – “And G-d remembered No'ach, and all the animals and all the beasts that were with him in the ark; and G-d brought forth a wind over the land, and the waters settled” (*Ibid.* 8:1). This seems to correspond to the “*ru'ach Elokim* – G-dly wind” that prevailed at the beginning of Creation: וַיִּמְרַח אֱלֹהִים מְרֻחָף עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם – “And a G-dly wind hovered above the surface of the waters” (*1:2*). Creation, of course, began with the advent of light: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי־אוֹר – וַיְהִי־אוֹר – “And G-d said: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (*1:3*). Such was the initiation to the post-*Mabul* world, as well; as it states: וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת־חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה – “And it was at the end of 40 days, and No'ach opened the window of the ark” (*8:6*). Furthermore, the Creation narrative featured the existence of a solitary couple (Adam and Chavah); Hashem issued a directive to No'ach reminiscent of this arrangement: צֵא מִן־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ – “Exit the ark – you and your wife” (*8:16*).

In any event, we see in our days how the elite members of society – the so-called “intelligentsia” – scoff at the notion of Creation, instead devoting themselves to the bizarre cult of Science and Evolutionism. They may consider themselves sophisticated and progressive; but as we see, they are little more than throwbacks to the ancient, pre-*Mabul* days (for whom, it may be noted, matters did not work out so well).

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