



Parshat HaShavuah

נח

NOACH

OCTOBER 5, 2013

ראש חודש

א' חשון תשע"ד

A PUBLICATION OF



# Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

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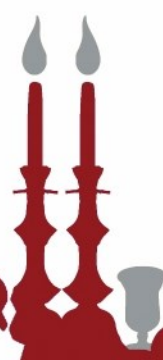
Sunset

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Motzei

Shabbat

7:37



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

MRS. AMY HOROWITZ 1, 4

## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

MRS. AMY HOROWITZ

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Determining the origin of human language has always been a problem. Scholars are stumped. How did human language evolve from caveman "Grunt" to over 6,900 languages across the world?

Although this question has, according to the Linguistic Society of America, become the "hardest problem in science today," one glance at Parshat Noach reveals a simple solution. The people of Shinar build a tower in order to protect themselves from dispersion. Hashem gets angry and punishes them with the very thing they fear most...dispersion! Instead of being able to communicate as before, Hashem confuses their languages by separating them into diverse nations with diverse cultures and languages and then scatters them throughout the world.

Rashi explains that this generation of tower-builders escapes the fate of their predecessors – the total destruction of humanity experienced in Noach's time – because of one thing and one thing only: unity. Despite the possible evil of their intentions, the builders of Migdal Bavel were at least unified in their quest to construct a heavenly tower. Not only that, but it seems the goal of their edifice was to protect themselves from being separated and scattered. In other words, more unity!

So why punish them at all? What is so egregious about wanting to stick together, stay close to home? Should they instead have not been rewarded for their efforts?

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## EVERY WORD COUNTS

JASON MIZRAHI ('17)

Hashem commands Noach to build an ark that would save himself, his family, and members of all living species from the coming flood. The word “ark” in Hebrew is “תיבה.” The Hebrew word “תיבה” can also be translated as “a letter.”

The Ba'al Shem Tov derives an enduring spiritual lesson from this second meaning. He says that Noach's ark serves to instruct us in the proper way to construct the words that we speak, including, but not limited to, when we pray before Hashem and learn Torah. Just as Noach is commanded by Hashem to “go into the ark,” we too must “go into our letters,” cautiously reflecting upon and consciously acknowledging that every letter of every word that we utter has meaning and depth. This interpretation of the word “תיבה” suggests that we must be careful not to spread lashon hara and should strive to consider how our words might impact others before we say them.

This idea also teaches us a valuable lesson about Torah—the Torah is not only the basis and source of our religious practices, but it is also a handbook of universal messages about life. Although such lessons may not seem readily apparent, we can find them—we just have to interpret the Torah in a deeper and broader way.

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## ALWAYS STRIVE FOR GREATNESS

YITZCHAK KAMINESTKY ('15)


In the NBA, teams can be grouped into three categories: the yearly championship contenders like the Miami Heat and Oklahoma City Thunder, the teams with consistently dismal records and primary draft picks like the Charlotte Bobcats and the Phoenix Suns, and the middle teams without much of a chance at the championship that contend for the lesser playoff competitions—among these are the Milwaukee Bucks and the Atlanta Hawks.

In this week's parsha, Noach is called “a complete man in *his generations*.” There are two apparent questions on this title. First, why does the pasuk use the plural form of the word “generations”? Second, what is the point of qualifying the statement with “in his generations” at all?

Rashi, answering both questions says that the text is comparing Noach's generation—one of great sin and the resulting flood—to Avraham's generation. There are two different interpretations of what Rashi is implying about Noach personally: it is either an insult or praise. On the one hand, it could be saying that Noach is only good *relative* to his generation, but had he lived in Avraham's generation, he would have merely been “normal.” Rashi might mean that Avraham was the true paragon of the righteous man, whereas Noach is simply “passable” since everyone else at that time is so immoral.

*Continued page 3*





*Kaminetsky continued*

Alternatively, the pasuk could be praising Noah by saying that while Noah is not the paragon of the righteous man, he is remarkably impressive because he repudiates the evil influences prevalent in his generation. Had he lived in Avraham's generation, however, he would have grown up to be an even greater tzadik because he would have been shaped by the positive morals being practiced around him.

Either way, we see that Noah lives in an environment in which he lets his surroundings dictate how much he flourishes. This unfortunate truth lessens his greatness.

We can learn a valuable lesson from this. Often, we look at ourselves in comparison to others. We try to justify our actions by comparing ourselves to others. When we comfort ourselves by saying, "I'm not perfect, but at least I'm not as bad as *that* person," it is analogous to viewing ourselves as the Bucks and Hawks. We are saying: "I might not be as good as the Miami Heat, but I'm also not as bad as the Bobcats, so I'm fine being the Hawks."

This is the wrong attitude to adopt as it does not encourage self-improvement. If we live our lives thinking that we are good because we are not bad, we will never grow to be great. We can not be content to remain "the Hawks" because if we do, we will never come close to a championship. Instead, we all must try to grow and improve internally without allowing our surroundings to distract us from our goals.

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## **BE A GIVER**

### **LEOR LEVENSON ('16)**

In *Parshat Noach*, the Torah records that, "The earth had become corrupt before G-d, and the earth had become filled with robbery" (Bereishit 6:11). The punishment that Hashem envisages is the earth's total destruction; however, the punishment seems disproportionate to the crime. How can Hashem destroy the entire world specifically because of robbery? After all, many terrible acts were committed before this! Adam and Chava explicitly defying Hashem and eating the forbidden fruit, Cayin murdering Hevel—surely these crimes are much worse.

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Green answers this perplexing question by explaining that the corruption and robbery that Hashem laments stem from a common, collective selfishness. A society whose members are concerned only for their own well-being and defy the most fundamental precept of the not-yet-given Torah—to love one's neighbor as he loves himself—is not a society fit to occupy the earth that Hashem created.

Noach, on the other hand, is described as "a righteous man, perfect in his generations" (Bereishit 6:9). This means that Noach is the "giver" in his generation while everyone else is a "taker." The punishment Hashem conceived would apply to everyone except the righteous and selfless—that is, Noach.

*Continued page 4*



*Levenson continued*

So Hashem commands Noach to build the *teiva*. Once it is complete, at least two of every species in the world board the *teiva* and wait. Who is expected to feed them? Who is asked to put the survival of the animals before his own needs? Who is required to “give?” Noach, the tzadik of his generation. He has the capacity to “give,” and in his selflessness, he helps all the animals in the world survive.

The world would not be here today if Noach had been self-centered and allowed himself to be tainted by his generation’s corruption. People today must learn to be “givers” and to exhibit the traits of a tzadik in this generation. Being the Noach of one’s generation may not be an easy task, but there are many ways to at least act like him. “Giving” tzedaka, “giving” time for community service, and even “giving” help to someone on a homework assignment are all simple ways to become a “giver,” and to try to emulate Noach.

*Mrs. Howorwitz continued*

Ohr HaChaim suggests that Hashem’s separation of one people into many cultures was not a punishment but a reality check. After creating Man, Hashem commands him to “fill” the Earth, explore it, and conquer it: “*u’milu et ha’aretz vekivshuha*” (Bereishit 1:28). When the people of Shinar decide to protect their unity and remain rooted in one spot, they unwittingly threaten the fulfillment of Hashem’s plan for Man to spread throughout the Earth. Hashem’s decision to scatter them into diverse nations is therefore not punitive, but simply the implementation of His original plan.

Could this be the lesson of the *dor haflagah*, the generation of The Dispersion? The unity of the tower-builders was born out of fear of the outside world. They wanted to remain insulated and segregated inside their fortress. But this was clearly not Hashem’s master plan. Hashem created a big and exciting world for Man to inhabit. If the people of the *dor haflagah* were afraid to spread their wings, Hashem would just have to push them out of the nest.

Unity does not mean sticking only with people who are just like us and separating ourselves from the rest of the world. True unity means recognizing, appreciating, and tolerating diversity. Unity forces us to recognize that our differences don’t have to divide us but can instead enhance and enrich our human experience.

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7902 Montoya Circle  
Boca Raton, FL 33433  
Phone: 561-417-7422  
Fax: 561-417-7028  
www.wyhs.net