

NOACH ON BERAISHIS

SANCTIFIED BEGINNINGS

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Parshas Noach hurried in this year, leaving little time to delve in Parshas Beraishis, which followed directly with Shabos, at the conclusion of Simchas Torah. Yet, the Parsha, Noach, contains some basic teachings in the Beraishis spirit. It includes some fundamental principles that deal with creation, Beraishis. Thus it helps us study Chumosh once again with the sense of refreshing beginning, with the feeling of renewal on a higher lever. Let us here discuss three such items:

1) The first passage of Parshas Noach describes him as "a righteous man", "Noach Ish Tzadik". It is for this reason that he was chosen out of all humanity to be saved from the flood, and continue world survival. Yet, exiting the ark he built, he is called "the man of the earth", "Ish Hoadomo" (9:20), as he embarked to plant a vineyard. The Midrash is critical of Noach's choice in this endeavor. His Beraishis, foundation of the new world after the Flood, should have concentrated on matters of spirit and morality, a new world order, to avoid the pitfalls which brought about the Flood.

The fact that shame and humiliation was brought upon him through one of his own children (9:24) manifests his failure to focus on his own children, promulgating high moral levels for the new world.

Commentators see a connection between the first Mitzva in Beraishis, to be fruitful and multiply, and the last Mitzva of the Torah, to write a Sefer Torah. To be fruitful and multiply, they say, implies creating living Sifrei Torah, leading a life of uplifting spirit in the service of Hashem.

A highlight of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Maariv is the chapter L'Dovid Mizmor (Tehilim 24) which is recited with utmost fervency and intense emotion. One of its passages reads: "Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand (remain standing) in the place of His sanctity?" (24:3).

Like Noach, descending from Ish Tzadik to Ish Hoadomo, one often experiences elevating spirits in a brief moment of exhilarating ecstasy, and then sloping down to the former routine and unlaudible habits. How appropriate and timely on those holiest evenings, when peaks of Kedusha are reached, to recite this passage, seeking to sustain the level during the whole year.

2) The 136th chapter of Tehilim mentions 26 times "KI L'OLOM CHASDO", for His kindness endures forever". The Talmud notes (Pesochim 118a) that this refrain, repeated 26 times, corresponds with the 26 generations that lived from Adam to Moshe, from creation to the generation receiving the Torah. We learn that the world was created for the purpose of receiving the Torah, "Beraishis, for the sake of Torah which is called Raishis" (Rashi Beraishis 1:1). How then did the world exist during those 26 generations? It was a special act of divine Kindness (Chasdo), since humanity was as yet not ready to receive the Torah.

It should be emphasized that this lack of readiness was only from the angle of humanity, the recipients. From the angle of Heaven, however, says the Zohar (Pinchas 216a) the Torah was ready to be given at the time of the Flood. (Instead, because of unworthiness, the punishment of the Flood was meted).

Even the Neshomo of Moshe has already then been on the horizon. So teaches the Talmud (Chulin 139b). The Talmud adds it is indicated in the planning stage of the Flood (Beraishis 6:3) in the words "beshagom hu bosor". "Beshagom" is numerically equivalent to "Moshe" (see Reb Tzodok in Tzidkos Hatzadik chapter 76).

The 26 generations of life is based on divine gemilas chesed, usually referred to as a loan, rather than the Chesed of outright charity. Once the Torah was received and kept, that loan was repaid. The Torah and Moshe already on the horizon designated the 26 generations as a waiting period. See Rashi on Yom Hashishi (Beraishis 1:31) all creation was waiting for the 6th of Sivan, the day the Torah was given.

The Mishna teaches (Avoth 5:2): There were ten generations from Adam to Noach, it demonstrates Hashem's degree of patients, for all the ten generations were sinful, yet punishment of the Flood was meted out only with

the 10th generation. The Mishna continues (5:3): There were ten generations from Noach to Abraham; it demonstrates Hashem's patience, for all these were sinful but only Abraham received the reward for all. Where is the parallel to the earlier Mishna? Where is the punishment? Says the Mehal: Since the opportunity of Torah was there for all mankind, and because of their sinfulness they were rejected, (and only Abraham was chosen) there could be no greater punishment than that. "He relates His word to Jacob, His statutes and judgments to Israel. He does not do so for any other people, such judgments they do not know" (Tehilim 147:19, 20).

Both the Torah and the Jewish people are called Raishis. Both were uppermost in the Will of the Al-mighty in the creation of the world (see Rashi Braishis 1:1). The two Raishis's were intended to march together, exclusively, always. The Klal Yisroel is charged to place the Torah, which is called Raishis, at the forefront of its interests, while the Torah is Firstly and centrally concerned with the Klal Yisroel which is also called Raishis.

3) The choice of Eretz Yisroel as the land of Kedusha, given to the Jewish people, is accentuated in the very first passage in Beraishis. Rashi expounds the reason the Torah begins with creation is to be able to respond to the critics disclaiming our right to the land. The Jewish response: The Al-mighty Who created the entire world granted the land to us, and so is clearly stated in the Chumash. Parshas Noach, too embellishes this truth in connection with Abraham. The Torah reads (11:31) Terach took his son Avrom and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and his daughter-in-law Sarah - and THEY departed with them - to go to the land of Canaan. Grammatically, since it was Terach who took "Vayikach" in the singular, the sentence should have concluded and "he" departed with them.

The answer is that the thought of Canaan, later the Land of Israel and its Kedusha, inspired Avrohom to attain leadership and supremacy in the quest for the holy land. This is a major compliment to Avrohom recorded in Parshas Noach, and is a harbinger to Lech Lecho, the command to go to Eretz Yisroel.

