

Noach – 5783

Midrashic commentaries suggest that Abraham was HaShem's third attempt to find a partner in the task of repairing the world. The first question has to be why HaShem, who we believe to be perfect, would create a world that needs any perfecting? What is the purpose of making or building or constructing or indeed, creating anything that is not perfect from the get-go? My answer to that question would be linked to the same reason he had to wait until Abraham came along to finally believe he had found what he was looking for.

To begin, let me take you back to my comments from last week concerning the theme I believe helps us understand what happens in the narrative of the Five Books of Moses. Last week we read about creation and HaShem's pronouncement that all was GOOD. Note we do not hear PERFECT, only good. That's sort of like hearing a parent comment on a report card by saying it's good, but you can do better. So, the world was created and then HaShem created Adam, presumably to be his partner in Tikkun HaOlam or repairing the world. But Adam, once accompanied by Eve, eats from the Tree of Knowledge and then he and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden. Adam then becomes the first to be eliminated as a true partner. It was at this point that I suggested that what happened between the eating of the apple and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden was first shame and then guilt. Same because the pair became aware of their nakedness and then guilt because HaShem questioned what had happened and they heard their punishment which they then reflected on. I argued that what happened between shame and guilt was insight, a dawning

awareness of what they had done wrong. Nevertheless, there was no going back and so they were cast out.

The sages teach that there were ten generations between Adam and Eve and Noah, or Noach in Hebrew, who is the subject of this week's parsha. The parsha begins with the words "Eleh Toldot Noach...." this is the line of Noah"and then it continues Noah was a righteous man. Noach was a tzaddik. That's what the text says.... but think about that word LINE. It implies a list of descendants, but we don't get that. However, when I looked up the word Toldot in my very old Hebrew-English dictionary by Alcalay, Toldot can also mean result, sequence, consequence, or conclusion. That strikes me as very interesting given what happens in the story line and that the what the rabbis say about Noah and how he too was a failed attempt at finding a partner to be Taken or improve the world.

We are told Noach is a Tzaddik, but only in comparison to those around him. In other words, HaShem is experimenting here with him. HaShem has already decided that his creation is beyond redemption and repair. He has already decided that the world must come to an end and that Noah will be man to rebuild the world after the coming deluge. We all know the rudiments of the rest of the story. Noah builds the ark and that takes him not just weeks but years so presumably HaShem is waiting patiently for Noah to be ready. Finally, the ark is done, the animals go into the Ark two by two, the flood begins, the ark floats on the waters for forty days and forty nights. The rains stop and begin to recede. Noah sends out the dove not once but twice until the dove brings back a tree branch so our scientific mind has to wonder how long that must have really taken but that's not germane at the moment. Eventually the ark settles, the family and the animals exit the ark. HaShem consecrates the moment by displaying a rainbow and telling Noah and his

family that this will be a sign of his covenant with them. After a time, Noah plants a vineyard and presses wine afterwards. He proceeds to get inebriated and embarrasses himself in front of his sons. One of his sons laughs and another covers up their father's nakedness. Noah sleeps off his binge and when he wakes up, he blesses and curses his sons appropriately. Then the text tells us he lived 350 years and he died. That's it. We are given the generations of the sons of Noah and then the building of the Tower of Babel occurs. So, what happened to the covenant and rebuilding the world, the whole process of Tikkun HaOlam. Obviously, Noah and his line are failures. So, remember when I said Toldot, the word used at the very beginning of the parsha also means result, sequence, consequence, or conclusion. So, all that we have read is not just about the line of Noah, but the sequence of events and the consequences of the flood.

But where is the failure and why did I refer to last week's Davar Torah? Last week I tried to suggest that one of the abiding lessons of not just the one parsha but all the parshiot is the role of insight and the search for man's insight into what is expected of him and how he, we, are meant to leTake HaOlam. We are meant to learn from our mistakes, and we are meant to come to understand what is expected of us as instruments of the divine. Noah began as a tzaddik and was bestowed by HaShem with great honour because of it. HaShem chose him, thinking he might be the one who would begin the process of improving creation and making mankind better, but he ended up no further ahead, if not further back in that quest. Remember that the sages teach that HaShem granted us free will and the ability to make our own choices between Yetzer HaRah and Yetzer HaTov, the good and the evil inclination. Noah, like Adam, chose the evil inclination after being favored by HaShem and so could not be a partner in the perfecting of

creation. They both lacked the insight to see that HaShem chose them for a purpose and chose instead to ignore that bounty, that good fortune, and the consequences (Toldot) of their behaviour were to be cast aside as partners. HaShem was still searching for that, and we will soon read that he found it in Avram, the son of Terach. Shabbat shalom.