

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT NOACH

### DVAR TORAH: THE ARK OF CHESED

Noach was a tremendous man of chesed (lovingkindness), says the Michtav Mei'Eliahu (Rav Eliahu Dessler zt"l [1892-1953], mashgiach ruchani of the Gateshead and Ponevitch Yeshivas). If we think vividly for a moment about what the inside of the ark must have been like during the year of the flood, we can imagine the tens of thousands of animals, their noise, their movements, and their hunger. It was up to Noach and his family to feed those tens of thousands of animals – on time. And Noach did it.

The midrash, based on the expression “vayisha'er ach Noach,” “only Noach was left,” comments that the lion was once fed late and attacked Noach, causing Noach to scream “Ach!” But this only shows that the rest of the time Noach fed all the animals on time.

Noach's chesed to the animals was the spiritual dimension of the ark, the “precious stone that illuminated it.” This chesed is what really protected Noach during the flood, keeping the ark from being torn to bits by the dangerous churning waters.

There were, however, two possible types of salvation from the flood:

1. One was to be inside the ark. Outside the ark Noach would not have lasted; inside he was safe. There was danger, but Noach was saved from it.
2. Another way to be saved was to be in the Land of Israel. The sages tell us (Zevachim 113a) that the flood waters did not fall on the Land of Israel. The danger did not affect Israel at all. But Noach did not merit this type of salvation.

There are also two types of chesed, says Rav Dessler:

1. One was Noach's, doing chesed because it had to be done. Noach was a “tzaddik tamim,” a perfectly righteous man, and because there is an obligation to act with kindness, he did it. Chesed was just the thing to do. This type of chesed (referred to as “Chesed sheb'Yesod”) saved him from the dangerous floodwaters.
2. There is another level of chesed, one where the whole person is motivated by kindness, and feels pain if not able to do it. This was Avraham's character. If Noach did not do chesed, he did not feel pain — he did what had to be done, what was just. But Avraham felt pain if he could not do chesed. On a hot day, when there were no guests, Avraham went out looking for them; he could not tolerate the inability to do chesed.

This constant inner chesed, pure altruism, merited Avraham with the Land of Israel. God's attention is constantly focused on the Land of Israel, shining His Chesed on it at all time. He protects even from the source of danger – the flood waters did not fall in Israel – and not only from its affects – an ark within which one is safe. Perhaps this is why Hashem calls Himself “Magen Avraham,” the shield of Avraham.

## SOURCE GUIDE: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL?

The people who built the Tower of Babel did something so terrible that the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10:3) says that the generation of the “Dor Haplagah” (the “Generation of the Dispersion”) has no portion in the World to Come. What exactly did they do wrong? The Chumash is extremely cryptic. Some of the approaches that appear in rabbinic sources include high level crimes: waging war against God (Bereishit Rabbah 38:6), worshipping idols (Sanhedrin 109a), and denying that the flood was a Divine punishment, creating supports for the heaven so it won't fall again like it did after the first 1656 years since creation (Bereishit Rabbah 38:6). If that is the case, the sins of that generation were so extreme that they are out of the range of most of our sinning capabilities, and hard to learn from. The following question must therefore be addressed:

### What can we learn from the Tower of Babel?

What can normal, decent people learn from the Tower of Babel episode? There is a comment in the Midrash that builds on one expression that appears in the story and is extremely relevant to all. The story in the Chumash begins as follows:

<p><b>Bereishit 11</b></p> <p>1) The whole world was of one language and unified in what they said.</p> <p>2) When they traveled from the east they found themselves a valley in the land of Shinar <b>and dwelt there.</b></p>	<p><b>בראשית יא</b></p> <p>(א) וַיְהִי כָל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים:</p> <p>(ב) וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּקֶעֶה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם:</p>
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The Midrash picks up on the expression “vayeishvu sham,” “they dwelt there.”

<p><b>Yalkut Shimoni Noach 62</b></p> <p>They dwelt there – Anywhere you find “dwelling” the Satan jumps. Anywhere you find “resting of the spirit” the Satan accuses. Anywhere you find eating and drinking the Satan accuses.</p>	<p><b>לקוט שמעוני נח סב</b></p> <p>וישבו שם – כל מקום שאת מוצא ישיבה השטן קופץ, כל מקום שאת מוצא נחת רוח השטן מקטרג, בכל מקום שאת מוצא אכילה ושתייה השטן מקטרג:</p>
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Midrashim collect four other places where the verb ישב – a seemingly innocuous word – has negative associations:

### 1 – Yaakov Avinu

<p><b>Bereishit 37</b></p> <p>1) Yaakov dwelled in the land of his fathers' sojourning, in the land of Canaan.</p>	<p><b>בראשית לו</b></p> <p>(א) וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן:</p>
<p><b>Bereishit Rabbah 84:6</b></p> <p>Rabbi Acha said: When the righteous sit in tranquility and want to dwell tranquilly in this world, the Satan comes and accuses and says, “Isn't it enough for them that the World to Come is prepared for them? They also want to live in tranquility in this world?” You should know that this is correct, for Yaakov wanted to live in tranquility in this world and the Yosef episode confronted him ...</p>	<p><b>בראשית רבה פד ו:</b></p> <p>א"ר אחא בשעה שהצדיקים יושבים בשלום ומבקשים לישב בשלום בעולם הזה השטן בא ומקטרג אמר לא דיין שהוא מתוקן להם לעולם הבא אלא שהם מבקשים לישב בשלום בעולם הזה, תדע לך שהוא כן, יעקב אבינו ע"י שבקש לישב בשלום בעוה"ז נזדווג לו שטנו של יוסף ...</p>

### 2 – Yosef's Brothers

<p><b>Bereishit 37</b></p> <p>25) They sat to eat bread and lifted up their eyes and say a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilad ...</p>	<p><b>בראשית לו</b></p> <p>(כה) וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכֹל לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיֵּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אַרְבַּת יִשְׁמָעֵאלִים בָּאָה מִגִּילָד</p>
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### 3 – The Golden Calf

<p><b>Shemot 32</b> 6) They rose early on the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought forth peace offerings and the nation sat to eat and drink then they got up for frivolity.</p>	<p><b>שמות לב</b> (ו) וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ מִמָּחֳרַת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּגִּשׁוּ שְׁלָמִים וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וְשָׂתוּ וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק:</p>
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### 4 – The Daughters of Moav

<p><b>Bamidbar 25</b> 1) Israel dwelled in Shitim and the nation defiled through straying after the daughters of Moav.</p>	<p><b>במדבר פרק כה</b> (א) וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשֵׁטִים וַיַּחֲלֵה הָעָם לְזָנוֹת אֵל בָּנוֹת מוֹאָב:</p>
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### The Midrash

<p><b>Shemot Rabbah 41</b> “The nation sat to eat and drink then they got up for frivolity” – for idolatry. Anywhere you find “yeshivah” – dwelling – you find a problem. For we find with the generation of the Tower that it says “They found themselves a valley in the land of Shinar and dwelt there.” What problem came up? “They said, ‘Let us build a city” (Bereishit 11). “They sat to eat bread” (Bereishit 37), and they sold Yosef. “Israel dwelled in Shitim.” What problem came up there? “The nation defiled through straying after the daughters of Moav” (Bamidbar 25) ...</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה מא</b> וישב העם לאכול ושתו ויקומו לצחק, בעבודת כוכבים, כ”מ שאתה מוצא ישיבה אתה מוצא שם תקלה, שכן מצינו בדור המגדל שנא’ (בראשית יא) וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם, ומה תקלה היתה שם (בראשית י”א) ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר, (בראשית לז) וישבו לאכל לחם וכתוב וימכרו את יוסף, (במדבר כה) וישב ישראל בשטים מה תקלה היתה שם, ויחל העם לזנות אל בנות מואב ...</p>
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Though the sins of the generation of the Tower of Babel were, perhaps, so extreme that they are out of our sinning range, we can, however, learn to avoid **what led to their sins**. They were guilty of “dwelling”. “Dwelling” means living with a sense of excessive tranquility, satiation, taking it easy. It means relating to this world as if it is already the World to Come. Becoming complacent and losing the healthy tension of this world – says the Midrash - opened up even great people like Yaakov Avinu and Yosef’s brothers to problems and mishaps. For the masses it led to the Golden Calf and sinning with the daughters of Moav. The post-flood world wanted to plateau, to have that sense of “being there” not “going there” and they fell off the moral and spiritual cliff.

This world is not the place to settle down; it is the place for action and growth.

**Berachot 64a:** Said Rabbi Chiya son of Rav Ashi in the name of Rav – Talmidei Chachamim, Torah sages, have no rest, neither in this world nor in the world to come, as it says, They go from strength to strength and will appear before God in Zion.

### Additional Learning:

- Note the different reactions of the Satan to “yeshivah”: sometimes he **jumps** and sometimes he **accuses**. What is the difference between the two?
- Note the three problems that excite the Satan: “yeshivah”, “nachat ruach”, and eating & drinking. Why are each one of these problematic and how are they different?
- Another source that points out the negative associations of the root ישב: Rabbi Yochanan (Sandhedrin 106a) says that it is a “lashon tzaar” – it is foreboding, and painful things are to come. “Israel dwelled in the land of Goshen” in Bereishit 47 is followed by the death of Yaakov; and Israel dwelling under their fig trees and grape vines in King Solomon’s time is followed by the threat of Edom (Melachim I 11).

## TWO SURVIVORS, BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

Noach is commanded to rebuild a devastated world. But all we know of Noach's remaining 350 years is one incident: "And Noach became a master of the earth (**אִישׁ אֲדָמָה**), and he planted a vineyard. And he drank from the wine and he became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent (Bereshit 9:20-21). Noach's children find him in his shameful state. When he awakens he speaks for the first and only time recorded in the Torah, cursing his grandson and blessing Hashem and his sons.

Noach, who was earlier called **אִישׁ צַדִּיק**, the righteous man (6:9), is now lowered to the level of the earth, **אִישׁ אֲדָמָה**! And while it is sensible to undertake agriculture in a world stripped of all life, says Rashi, Noach should plant grain before grapes.

R. Moshe Alshekh says that throughout his life, Noach had shut himself up in his own world. This may have been the key to his moral survival, but it also shows his moral limitations. By enclosing Noach in the ark, Hashem criticizes Noach's failure to motivate mankind to repent.

When the flood rains began, the people tried to destroy the ark. Hashem pulled Noach in. What did Noach hear? He first heard the pounding of the rain, the clawing against the sides of the ark, hysterical cries and, then, a silence to mock Noach's own wordlessness. At this point, says the Midrash, Noach began to pray for mercy, but Hashem said it was too late.

It was at this horrible moment Noach realized he was a survivor. Having not had an impact on his world, Noach feels guilty for being alive.

This might explain Noach's desire to numb himself with wine. Abravanel (Don Yitzchak Abravanel, 1437-1508) – himself a survivor of the expulsion from Spain in 1492 – writes: "Perhaps when he was disgusted with his life because of the waters of the flood, he sought to make wine to drink of it, so that he would no longer drink water, nor would he see it ever again."

But this need not be the only way to survive tragedy. Avraham witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Amorah, however, he moved to the Negev, because, as Rashi points out, "When he saw that the cities were destroyed and wayfarers ceased, he withdrew from there." Avraham's response to tragedy was to seek out new opportunities for chesed. Unlike Noach Avraham rebuilt the destroyed world by spreading Hashem's goodness.

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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