

The issues of Parsha Potpourri in 2026 are dedicated
לז"נ ברוך בן חיים זאב ז"ל
לז"נ אסתר בת ניסים יצחק ושמחה ז"ל
לז"נ יצחק מנחם בן ניסים דוד ויהודית יוכבד ז"ל
לרפ"ש יהודית יוכבד בת שרה
This week's issue is also dedicated
לז"נ חנה בת שלמה ז"ל

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Noach – Vol. 22, Issue 2

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ויזכר אלקים את נח ... ויעבר אלקים רוח על הארץ וישכו המים (8:1)

וגם את נח In the Zichronos (Remembrances) section of Mussaf on Rosh Hashana, we mention that Hashem remembered Noach with love when he was in the ark and sent a wind that caused the water to subside. Noach was deemed the most righteous person in his generation and uniquely worthy of being saved from the destruction that befell his contemporaries. Why then did Hashem need to lovingly remember him to rescue him from the mabul (flood) from which he had already been exempted, and what merit did Noach possess that aroused Hashem's feelings for him?

To clarify this cryptic line in our Rosh Hashana prayers, Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam quotes the Gemara's statement (Sanhedrin 108a) that Noach should also have been included in the punishment of the flood, but he was spared because he found chein (favor) in Hashem's eyes. What attribute of Noach caused him to find favor in Hashem's eyes, and how did this enable him to survive if he was initially found undeserving?

The Sefer Chareidim explains that a person who does not get angry finds chein in Hashem's eyes. Similarly, the Gemara (Pesachim 113b) lists three categories of people who are beloved by Hashem, one of which is those who do not readily anger. Applying this to Noach, Rashi writes (Avodah Zara 6a) that he was exceedingly humble and unassuming, which made him a savlan (patient person) who did not get upset when things did not go his way. Similarly, the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 30:5) says that he had an easygoing nature and got along with everyone. These traits are why Noach found favor in Hashem's eyes and engendered His love, enabling him to survive the mabul.

The Gemara records (Sanhedrin 108b) that Avrohom's servant Eliezer met Noach's son Shem and asked him what life was like inside the ark. Shem explained that they suffered terribly, as they spent their time constantly feeding the animals around the clock, each with its own unique menu and mealtime, and when Noach was once tardy with the lion's food, it responded by biting him (Rashi 7:23). Why did Hashem make the conditions in the ark so challenging?

Although Noach's track record of composure exempted him from the initial decree of the mabul, it was insufficient. Throughout his stay on the ark, he was required to demonstrate ongoing patience to be protected from the floodwaters raging outside, and it was this tremendous savlanus that caused Hashem to remember Noach with compassion and make the waters subside.

Noach teaches us that even a person who does not deserve to be saved can still be rescued if he is patient and slow to anger. For this reason, we invoke Noach on Rosh Hashana as a way of petitioning Hashem that, just as He favorably remembered Noach not because he was worthy but because of his amiable and even-tempered personality, so too, even if we are deemed lacking, may He still have mercy on us because of our savlanus. Jews around the world are in desperate need of Divine mercy. Let us learn from Noach that if we strive to overlook wrongs done to us and swallow the sharp words we are tempted to express, then, measure for measure, Hashem will also swallow His anger and spare us from the punishments we would otherwise receive.

ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה (9:20-21)

After the waters of the mabul subsided and Hashem commanded Noach and his family to leave the ark, Noach emerged and found himself surrounded by a desolate wasteland, a physical reminder of the year

of unprecedented destruction that the world had just endured. Overwhelmed by the sheer amount of rebuilding that would be required to make the world inhabitable again, Noach chose to begin by planting a vineyard.

The Torah criticizes Noach's actions, noting that he desecrated and sullied himself by doing so. The result was that he became drunk after drinking the wine and passed out naked in a drunken stupor. Rashi explains that Noach's error was that he should have overcome his craving for wine and begun by planting more essential trees.

The Midrash goes further, contrasting the Torah's antediluvian description of Noach as a righteous man with the fact that his error transformed him into a debased and sullied individual. Although Noach could certainly have shown better judgment in his priorities for rebuilding the earth, why was his mistake deemed so catastrophic? As the vineyard served a valuable purpose, why does the Torah take Noach to task for such a seemingly insignificant miscalculation?

Understanding the following Midrash will help us answer this question. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 10:4) relates that Shlomo got married on the night after the construction of the first Temple was finished. To keep him from waking up early the next morning, his new wife hung a sheet over his bed and drew pictures of the moon and stars on it so that when he woke, he would think it was still night and go back to sleep.

On that night, Shlomo uncharacteristically slept until four hours after sunrise, and the Jews waiting eagerly to offer the morning sacrifice had to wait until that time, as the keys to the Temple were underneath his head. When his mother heard the offering was delayed because he slept late, she went to wake him and rebuked him soundly.

Although it would have been better to bring the sacrifice at the earliest possible time, nothing was technically lost, as it was still offered within the acceptable time range. Further, Shlomo did nothing wrong, as he was rejoicing with his new bride and only slept late because she tricked him. Why, then, was his mother so upset with him?

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro answers that Shlomo's mother understood the importance of a proper beginning, both to the Temple and to one's marriage, as everything that follows is an outgrowth of that foundation. She therefore wanted to emphasize to Shlomo that no excuse in the world justifies damaging the foundation of a new project.

Similarly, Rav Shapiro explains that by harshly denigrating Noach, the Torah is teaching us that although his decision may seem like a trivial oversight, planting the vineyard set the tone for his actions in rebuilding the world. Although it was possible to undo the damage caused by poor judgment, the solid foundation would still be missing.

As the recent Yomim Tovim fade into the past, we return to our daily lives. Whether we are returning to a new school year, our jobs, or caring for our families, we should internalize the lesson of Noach and Shlomo and plant solid foundations that will help ensure success in all our endeavors in the year to come.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) Rashi writes (6:16) that some say a precious stone inside the ark gave light to Noach and his family during the mabul. Who else in Tanach found himself in a dark place that was illuminated by a precious stone? (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 10)
- 2) Rashi writes (8:22) that the celestial bodies stopped functioning during the mabul, and there was no way to distinguish day from night. If so, how was Noach able to keep track of the passage of time and know when it was the appropriate time to feed the animals? (Sifsei Chochomim, Shu"t Minchas Elozar 4:42, Ichud B'Chidud 5777)
- 3) The Gemara in Bava Kamma (91b) derives from a pasuk (verse) in Parshas Noach (9:5) that it is forbidden to injure not only others, but also oneself. Does a person who has plastic surgery solely

for cosmetic reasons transgress this prohibition? (Rambam Hilchos Chovel U'Mazik 5:1, Shu"t Igros Moshe Choshen Mishpat 2:66, Shu"t Chelkas Yaakov Choshen Mishpat 31, Shu"t Minchas Yitzchok 6:105, Shu"t Minchas Shlomo 2:86, Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer 11:41, Shu"t Mishneh Halachos 4:246-7)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) The **Midrash** says a pearl was suspended inside the belly of the large fish that swallowed Yonah. The pearl shone like the sun and allowed Yonah to see everything around him, fulfilling the pasuk: (Tehillim 97:11) **אור זרע לצדיק** – light is sown for the righteous.

2) The **Sifsei Chochomim** explains that Rashi does not mean the celestial bodies were not operational during the mabul. They continued to illuminate as usual, but they remained in place instead of rotating in their natural orbits. Thus, for the duration of the flood, half the world was always light, while the other half was completely dark, thereby preventing a person from distinguishing between day and night if he remained in the same place. Nevertheless, how did Noach keep track of time? He did so through the animals, whose circadian rhythms naturally cause them to make noise at dawn. Alternatively, he suggests that Noach may have had a sundial in the ark, which he used as a clock. However, the **Minchas Elozar** notes that a sundial would be useless at a time when the sun was stationary. Instead, he posits that Noach had a watch similar to ours, which he was still able to use to keep track of the date and the passage of time.

3) **Rav Moshe Feinstein** discusses the case of a woman who wanted to have plastic surgery to improve her appearance and rules that it is permissible to do so. He quotes the **Rambam**, who writes that the Torah prohibition against injuring a person (including oneself) only applies when it is done maliciously and degradingly, which is not the case when someone undergoes a surgical procedure. Even if one disagrees with this distinction, Rav Moshe still permits the surgery because it is done willingly and for the woman's well-being. This is also the opinion of the **Chelkas Yaakov**. In the case of a woman who wanted to have her nose surgically altered because she felt it was unattractive and made it difficult for her to get married, **Rav Menashe Klein** cites Talmudic sources that imply medical procedures intended to improve one's appearance were performed in the time of Chazal, thereby proving their permissibility. He adds that it is forbidden for a man to undergo surgery solely to enhance his looks, as attempting to beautify himself in this manner violates the prohibition against adopting female garb and conduct (Devarim 22:5). However, if his appearance causes him so much discomfort that he avoids interacting with others, surgery would then be permissible. **Dayan Yitzchok Yaakov Weiss** agrees that cosmetic surgery does not violate the prohibition against injuring oneself. Still, he is hesitant to permit any elective surgery due to the inherent risk involved, and he concludes that the issue requires further study. On the other hand, **Rav Eliezer Waldenberg** strongly prohibits all cosmetic surgery. He argues that it is forbidden both for the doctor, who was only given permission by the Torah to heal sick patients but not to perform unnecessary procedures on those who are healthy, and for the patient, who has no right to ask the doctor to wound him simply to enhance his appearance. Additionally, on a theological level, he maintains that plastic surgery is an insult to Hashem, as it implies that He created a person defectively and incorrectly. **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** permits cosmetic surgery if it is done to remove a blemish that causes a person psychological suffering and embarrassment, but he forbids elective procedures done solely to enhance one's appearance. For all practical halachic questions, one should consult a competent Rabbinical authority.