

PENINEI MEHKERE ERES

פניני מחקרי ארץ

HaRav HaGaon Rachamim Moshe Shayo Shlit"a

פרשת נח תשפ"ז



וַיְהִי כָל הָאָרֶץ שָׁפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשָׂרָפָה. וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נָפוּץ עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ. וַיֵּרֶד ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הֵן עָם אֶחָד וּשְׂפָה אֶחָת לְכָלם וְזֶה הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא יִבְצֹר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת

"And the whole earth was of one language and one speech. And they said to one another: Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. And they said: Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered across the face of all the earth. And Hashem descended to see the city and the tower that the children of man had built. And Hashem said: Behold, they are one people and they all have one language, and this is what they have begun to do — and now nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them." (11:1–6)

These verses describe the massive and brazen project undertaken by the people of Babel, and Hashem's reaction to it. The tone of Hashem's response is surprising in its apparent timid passivity, as if there was nothing Hashem could do, but stand by and watch. How can we reconcile this with Hashem's total power and might? Did Hashem, whose glory fills the entire earth, truly have reason to be frightened by this endeavor? After all, it is written (Yirmiyah 10:10): "וְה' אֱלֹהִים אֶמֶת, הוּא אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים, וּמִלְכָּה עוֹלָם מִקְצָפוֹ תִּרְעַשׁ הָאָרֶץ." "But Hashem is the true G-d; He is the living G-d and the eternal King — at His wrath the earth trembles, and the nations cannot endure His anger." And it is written: "כָּל הַגּוֹיִם כְּאֵין נִגְדוּ" "All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are accounted as less than nothing and emptiness" (Yeshayah 40:17). Why, then, did Hashem resignedly say: "and now nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them"?

The answer lies in the fact that Hashem created the world with human free will — the freedom to choose between good and evil - at its center, and He allows their conduct to play a large role in His governance of it. The Generation of the Flood of the previous era was consumed by jealousy, hatred, and lawlessness, and the earth was filled with violence; their verdict was sealed on account of theft. They had chosen the path of destruction, and what they chose was visited upon them. The Generation of the Dispersion, by contrast, were clever in their wickedness. They

recognized that if they turned on one another they would not survive — just as the Generation of the Flood had not — so they devised a strategy: to live in love and brotherhood, united in a single language and a shared purpose, and through that unity to rebel against Hashem. It was of this that Hashem said: "Behold, they are one people with one language" — they are united, with love and brotherhood among them. And when people choose love and brotherhood, they are in a sense choosing the good; but this generation was using that very good to steer the entire world toward evil. For the power of unity is immense — and with it, "nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them." Had they carried out their plans, they would have pulled the entire world into the abyss, with no hope of recovery. But this was not an expression of passivity or resignation; it was a description of what would play out, according to the rules Hashem Himself established for the world. For Hashem chose to govern the world in accordance with how human beings conduct themselves — He has placed free will in human hands — and if people unite in love and brotherhood and collectively rebel against the Almighty, they hold the G-d given power to do so, to the point of returning the world to its primordial state. And this would be worse than the Generation of the Flood — for in that generation, where there was no love or brotherhood, each person's wickedness worked against every other's; they were their own constraint. But when the wicked are united, nothing stands in the way of their evil, for who is left to rebuke them?

Hashem therefore said: "Come, let us descend and confuse their language, so that no man will understand the speech of his fellow." There was no remedy for the world other than to divide them — as it is then written, "and Hashem scattered them from there across the face of all the earth." To save the world from ruin, they had to be separated, and only then, by disarming them of their potent unity, could their plan be foiled. This is what our *Chachamim* teach (*Sanhedrin*, chapter 8, *mishnah* 5): "Dispersion for the wicked is good for them and good for the world." For the unity of the wicked brings

destruction upon the world.

We see from here how immense the power of unity truly is. If through unity alone the wicked could reach a point where "nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them," how awesome must be the power of unity for good — when *tzaddikim* gather, bound together in full-hearted devotion and service of Hashem with

“
We see from here how immense the power of unity truly is. If through unity alone the wicked could reach a point where “nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them,” how awesome must be the power of unity for good — when *tzaddikim* gather, bound together in full-hearted devotion and service of Hashem with love and awe. Such unity is good for them and good for the world — for through the power of unity, the world can be brought to its perfected state, completely reflecting the sovereignty of the Almighty.
”

love and awe. Such unity is good for them and good for the world — for through the power of unity, the world can be brought to its perfected state, completely reflecting the sovereignty of the Almighty.

So writes the holy *Zohar* at the end of the parashah (76b): “If the Generation of the Dispersion, merely by acting with a consensus of purpose and plan and speaking the holy tongue, could reach the point where ‘nothing they plan to do will be withheld from them’ — and the celestial judgment could not take hold of them — then we, the cadre of those who study Torah, when we are unified in our devotion and desire to serve G-d, how much more certainly will the attribute of judgment not be able to overpower us.” Ribbi Yosi added: “From here we learn a lesson for those who engage in dispute — that they have no lasting existence. For as long as the people of the world are united, even if their unity revolves around their rebellion against Hashem, the Divine judgment is silent before them — only their dispersal makes them susceptible. Conversely, then, those who sow discord have no lasting existence.” Ribbi Chiyya said: “Come and see — everything depends on the speech of human beings. For the moment Hashem confused their language, He scattered them. But in the future it is written: ‘לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם ה' לְעִבְדוֹ שָׂכֵם אֶחָד’ *For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Hashem and serve Him shoulder to shoulder*’ — and it is written: ‘וְהָיָה ה' אֶחָד’ *And Hashem shall be King over all the earth — on that day Hashem shall be One and His name One.*”

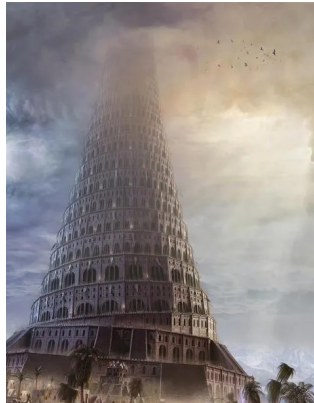
In the time of the *Gaon* Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, *zt"l*, the Emperor of Austria, Franz Joseph, visited Jerusalem. Everyone came to greet him with honor, with Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld at their head. When they met, the Emperor posed a question to Rabbi Yosef Chaim: why is it that the more the world advances and new technologies are invented, the further people seem to drift from faith in G-d?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim replied: in the Generation of the Dispersion, when the people came to the valley in the land of Shinar, it is written: “And they said to one another: Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly — and brick served them as stone, and mortar served them as clay.” Only afterward does the verse say: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.” At first glance, the order seems backwards — should they not have first decided to build the tower, and only then figured out how to make the bricks?

The answer, Rabbi Yosef Chaim explained, is this: when they first arrived in the valley and found no stone there, the idea of rebelling against Hashem had not yet occurred to them — for there was simply no material in that valley from which to build

a tower. Only after they invented the new technology of producing bricks themselves through kilns did their pride take hold. They saw that they could create things from nothing, and began to imagine that they could rebel against Hashem — for they believed that with enough ingenuity, they could invent their way past any obstacle. This teaches us that with each innovation, man strengthens his sense of his own abilities, and in inverse proportion to his expanded sense of his own power, his sense of the power of G-d is diminished.

Yet the *Chofetz Chaim* taught us that with the proper perspective, every new invention can serve to strengthen our *emunah*. So he writes at the end of his *Shem Olam* (part 1): in our time mankind



has invented the telescope of the astronomers, through which one can see to remarkable heights and distances; the hearing device called the telephone, allowing us to hear someone far away; the camera, which captures and preserves images; and a phonograph, which records the human voice and stores it without loss. Through all of these, it becomes a tangible reality to us that there is above us an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and that all our deeds are written in a book. For through the telescope we learn that although Hashem dwells on high in the heavens, He nonetheless sees and watches over all the inhabitants of the earth. From the telephone we learn that even though Hashem

is in the heavens above, He hears our prayers and our cries. From the camera we learn that there is indeed something above, in the heavens, that can retain the image and form of every human deed, good or bad. And from the phonograph we learn that every word we speak throughout our lives — even casual conversation — is recorded above, and no sound is lost. Hashem is showing us that even we, frail human beings, are capable of creating such things — how clear it is that Hashem, who fashioned the very nature of creation, sees all and hears all and records all.

And if this lesson in *emunah* could be drawn from the now primitive inventions of the *Chofetz Chaim*’s era, all the more so from the inventions that have emerged in our own day — when anyone can see a friend on the other side of the world in real time, speak with them, and record them. All of this comes to arouse us to be mindful of our speech and our deeds — for Hashem’s glory fills the entire earth; He sees our every action at every moment and hears our every word. This awareness obligates us to serve Hashem with love and awe, and to do His will all the days of our lives.

This weeks Divrei Torah is dedicated in loving memory of

Moshe (Morris) Ben Rachel Srour

Beloved Husband, Father, and grandfather.

May the entire family have Nechama and be consoled from Shamyim, Amen!

ה.נ.צ.ב.ה