



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

**תשפ"ה Noach**

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***Hello, Welcome!***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

In this week's portion, Noach, we learn about the first two of the three famous "generations" spoken about by our Sages. They are (1) the דור המבול - the "Generation of the Flood," and (2) the דור הפלגה, the - "Generation of the Dispersement." The third group, which appears much later in the Torah, is the דור המדבר, the - "Generation of the Wilderness." The uncomplimentary nomenclature "the generation of" is applied only when the whole generation is implicated and suffers the same fate.

The דור המבול - the "Generation of the Flood" were all guilty of murder, idol worship, and promiscuity; but the crime that sealed their fate for destruction was stealing. All humankind, except for Noach and his immediate family, accordingly perished in the flood.

The דור הפלגה - the "Generation of the Dispersement" conspired to build a tower to rebel against Hashem. They all suffered the fate of having their languages changed so that they could not communicate with one another. Their building project ceased, and they were dispersed to the four corners of the world.

The דור המדבר - the "Generation of the Wilderness" refers to the people between ages 20 and 60 who left Egypt, and believed the spies' negative report about the Land of Israel, rejecting the Land. They all perished during the forty years that the Jewish nation journeyed through the wilderness.

The two infamous "generations" in this week's portion comprised the entire inhabited world; and, had Hashem not intervened, would have brought the world to its destruction.

The Torah is not a history book; it is an instruction manual that relates these stories because there is much to learn from each of these "generations" and from how Hashem dealt with them.

About the “Generation of the Flood,” the Torah tells us (Genesis 6:11).

(יא) וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס:

*11) The earth had become corrupt before Hashem; and the earth became filled with robbery.*

Things had become so bad that Hashem regretted having created man. The verse tells us (Genesis 6:6):

(ו) וַיִּנְחַם יְיָ כִּי עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֵל לְבוֹ

*6) And Hashem reconsidered having made Man on earth, and He had heartfelt sadness.*

If not for Noach who found favor in Hashem’s eyes, Hashem would have destroyed the entire world, not just wiped out most life on it.

Rabbi Leib Bakst זצ"ל explains that Hashem created the world to bestow kindness upon His creations. As King David expressed in Psalm (89:3):

(ג) כִּי אָמַרְתִּי עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה נְשָׁמִים תִּכְנֶן אֱמוּנָתְךָ בְּהֵם

*3) For I have said, “Forever will {Your} kindness be built; the heavens You establish Your faithfulness in them.*

The Malbim explains this verse:

Hashem’s decision to create the world could only come from the kindness of His heart, so to speak, because Hashem is obligated to no one, and there is no power outside of Him that could force Him to create a world. So, Hashem created the world for the purpose of lovingkindness.

Additionally, when Hashem created the world with its properties and laws, He committed to faithfully maintain those laws so that they would operate constantly, and consistently, for all time, for example, *the*

*heavens*. So, upon creating the world for His creatures, Hashem established His faithfulness to them as well.

Therefore, explains Rabbi Bakst, because the world is established on a foundation of kindness, when the creations bestow kindness upon one another, they become partners with Hashem in His Creation and earn their right to exist in the Creation. When, however, man steals and plunders his fellow man, seeking only to take what he can from the world, he destroys the foundations of the Creation and forfeits his right to exist in the world.

This concept is what later sealed the fate of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the times of Avraham. They had an iron clad policy against kind acts to a fellow human being. If, for example, a poor person came to town, no one was permitted to provide him any food or lodging, forcing him to leave very quickly. Once, a poor man came to town and lasted a bit too long. The townspeople realized that someone must be feeding him on the sly, so they staked out an observer to discover the culprit. It turned out to be one of Lot's young daughters. To make sure that this would not happen again, they smeared her body with honey and put her in the sun for the bees, which stung her to death. This occurrence caused Hashem to decree the destruction of these cities.

In using a flood to destroy the world, which would necessitate Noach and his family to be in the ark with the animals for a full year, Hashem had a double intention. One was to punish the rest of the world's evil population, and the other was to establish the foundation of the "new world" as one of kindness. Noach and his family would be doing kindness with the animals by feeding them and tending to them for a full year - no small feat. They knew the eating habits of each animal, and fed them on time, time and again.

When it comes to the sin of the “Generation of the Dispersement,” the Torah doesn’t clearly say what their sin was. At first glance, it doesn’t seem like they did anything bad at all. The Torah tells us:

They found a valley in Shinar and settled there. Then, (Genesis 11:3,4):

(ג) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה וְתִהְיֶה לָּהֶם  
הַלְּבָנָה לְאַבֵּן וְהַחֲמֵר הִיָּה לָּהֶם לְחֵמֶר  
(ד) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לָּנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָּנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִפְּוֹץ  
עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ

*3) They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.” And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as mortar. 4) And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed across the whole earth.”*

The next thing we read is that Hashem looked down to see the city and tower that they had built, was displeased with it, and confused their language so that they would not understand one another. Then, Hashem dispersed them over the face of the earth.

The Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 38:6) interestingly informs us that Hashem deliberately did not reveal their actual sin.

ר"א אומר ודברים אחדים דבורים אחדים מעשה דור המבול נתפרש מעשה  
דור הפלגה לא נתפרש

*Rabbi Eliezer says, ... the story of the flood was clearly explained, whereas the story of the “Generation of the Dispersement” was not explained.*

Rabbi Yosef MiSalant explains the reason. When we hear that someone stole an item or acted inappropriately with a woman, we do not feel a desire to steal or commit a forbidden act. On the contrary, we

find the person's actions repugnant and want to distance ourselves from him. But matters of idol worship or atheism may be enticing to listen to, even just for curiosity. And once a person hears them, something might catch his fancy and start him on the path to denying Hashem. A person cannot control how something that he reads may affect his mind. The idea may lay dormant in his mind for a long time, but, at a moment of weakness, it may take hold. One should therefore not put himself in danger by reading books or ideas that are contrary to Torah thought, which is why the Torah did not spell out their crime. Hashem didn't want their erroneous ways to be stated in the Torah for all to read and contemplate. Hashem did, however, leave indications as to what their sin was that the Sages picked up on and revealed to us.

So, what do the Sages teach us?

That that generation built the tower to rebel against Hashem! The Midrash informs us that Nimrod was the mastermind who went to war with Hashem, and who convinced all the people to join him. The Torah teaches us (Genesis 10:8,9):

(ח) וְבוֹשׁ יִלְדֵּךְ אֶת נִמְרוֹד הוּא הֵחֵל לְהִיּוֹת גִּבּוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ

(ט) הוּא הָיָה גִבּוֹר צֵיד לִפְנֵי יְדֹד עַל בֶּן יֶאֱמַר בְּנִמְרוֹד גִּבּוֹר צֵיד לִפְנֵי יְדֹד

9) *And Cush begot Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty man on earth. 10) He was **a mighty hunter before Hashem; therefore it is said; "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Hashem."***

The verse's simple reading suggests that he was just a mighty hunter and likely a despicable character. However, Rashi sheds light on the verses' true meaning.

Rashi:

(ט) גבור ציד - צד דעתן של בריות בפיו והטען למרוד במקום

לפני ה' - מתכוין להקניטו על פניו

על כן יאמר - על כל אדם מרשיע בעזות פנים יודע רבונו ומתכוין למרוד בו  
יאמר זה כנמרוד גבור ציד

***A mighty hunter:*** *He would hunt the minds of the people with his mouth, and trick them into rebelling against Hashem.*

***Before Hashem:*** *His intentions were to anger Hashem*

***Therefore it is said:*** *Therefore, any person who is so audaciously evil, that he know his Master and deliberately rebels against him, we say about him, "This person is just like Nimrod!"*

Different opinions consider the tower's role in this mass rebellion. One view is that they were going to ascend to the heavens and actually fight with Hashem with axes and hammers. Another is that they were going to worship their idol there, right in Heaven with Hashem, to "show Him" that they don't want any part of Him. Yet all opinions agree that their motive was rebellion. This is why Hashem stopped their plans. They were headed on a crash course.

How remarkable! The "Generation of the Flood", that sinned by stealing from one another, was annihilated, but the "Generation of the Dispersment," that built its tower to rebel against Hashem and to worship their idols in His face, were left unharmed. All that Hashem did was confuse their language so that they would be unable to continue their project! Isn't this much worse than "mere" theft?

The Midrash (ibid) provides the answer.

אותן של דור המבול לא נשתיירה מהן פליטה ואלו של דור הפלגה נשתיירה מהם פליטה אלא דור המבול על ידי שהיו שטופים בגזל שנא' (שם כד) גבולות ישיגו עדר גזלו וירעו לפיכך לא נשתייר מהן פליטה אבל אלו על ידי שהיו אוהבים זה את זה שנאמר ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת לפיכך נשתיירה מהן פליטה

***No one survived from the "Generation of the Flood", whereas the "Generation of the Dispersment" survived. Because the "Generation of the Flood" engaged in theft and were evil to one another, they perished.***



*Whereas the “Generation of the Dispersment” loved one another and worked together, therefore they survived.*

Rabbi Yosef MiSalant learns another very profound lesson from the Tower of Bavel.

Rashi revealed to us that Nimrod’s prowess as a hunter was with his mouth, not his bow and arrow. **A mighty hunter:** *He would hunt the minds of the people with his mouth and trick them into rebelling against Hashem.* With his words, he was able to capture the people’s imagination and convince them to join him in the most frivolous task. “We are going to build a tower and ascend to the heavens and fight with Hashem!” He was able to convince them of the silliest notion.

Nimrod was the very first king to rule over people. Until his time, there were no kings and no wars. As a rule, people don’t want to be subject to the control of a ruler. They want to be free to do as they please. So how was Nimrod able to subjugate them?

It’s the story we all know so well. He convinced them with his slick rhetoric that he was there to liberate them and to look after their rights. If they follow his leadership, he will free them from the yoke of heaven. “We will pool our resources and wage war with Hashem until He has to let us go!”

In reality, his real goal was just to rule over and subjugate them, while acting like he is working on their behalf. Sound familiar?

The Torah here is warning us not to fall prey to the slick talkers who can convince people of anything.

The Sages teach us the source of Nimrod’s power of persuasion. The following is an enlightening excerpt from a lecture by Hagaon Rabbi Moshe Shapiro ל"צ.

Before Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were naked, yet were not embarrassed in front of one another. The moment that they ate from the tree, however, they realized

they were naked and hid in the garden. They covered themselves with a fig leaf, but later on we learn that Hashem made them “cloaks of skin.”

What happened to those cloaks? The Midrash tells us.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר - פרק כד

ר' יהודה אומ' הכתונת שעשה הב"ה לאדם ולאשתו היו עם נח ובניו אל התיבה וכשיצאו מן התיבה חם בן נח הוציאה עמו והנחילה לנמרוד ובשעה שהיה לובש אותם כל בהמה וחיה שהיו באין ונופלים על פניהם לפניו והיו בני אדם סבורין שהוא מכח גבורתו לפיכך המליכו אותו עליהם מלך שני' על כן יאמר כנמרוד גבור ציד לפני ה'

*Rabbi Yehuda said, “These special holy cloaks made by Hashem for Adam and Chava were given to Noach and were brought into the ark with Noach and his sons. When they left the ark, Cham stole them from his father Noach and gave them to his grandson Nimrod. When Nimrod wore those garments, all the animals would come and fall before him. The people thought it was Nimrod’s might that subdued the animals, and they made him king over them. This is what the verse means when it says, therefore it is said; ‘Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Hashem.’”*

Eisav killed Nimrod and took those cloaks from him, which is why Eisav was also called a “mighty hunter,” referring to the special clothing that Eisav trusted only his mother Rivka with and in which she dressed Yaakov when he appeared before Yitzchak to receive the blessings.

Remarkably both Nimrod and Eisav are also the only people whom the Torah says “*hunted with their mouths.*” As we saw earlier in Rashi, Nimrod would “*hunt the minds of the people with his mouth, and trick them into rebelling against Hashem.*” And regarding Eisav it says clearly in the verse (Genesis 25:28).

(כח) וַיֶּאֱהָב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו כִּי צִיד בְּפִיו וּרְבִקָּה אֶהָבֶת אֶת יַעֲקֹב

28) Yitzchak loved Eisav because he “**hunted him with his mouth**” and Rivkah loved Yaakov.

Our Sages note the connection.

Scripture uses three words to refer to a cloak or garment.

לא בוש -comes from the words לבוש “not embarrassed.” Clothing covers our bodies so that we don’t get embarrassed.

בגד - which as a verb means to rebel.

מעיל - comes from the word מעילה, which means to use something holy for mundane purposes, such as using a vessel from the Holy Temple for something personal.

All three words have a negative connotation because the clothing that we wear allows us to fool others and project ourselves as something that we are not. Before sinning, Adam and Chava were transparent. Their insides were as pure as their outsides and there was nothing to be embarrassed about. They had “cloaks of אור— light,” which is transparent. After the sin, Hashem made them cloaks of עור— skin, which comes from the word עור— blind. Skin blinds us as to what is underneath it.

This is where clothing creates a sort of *rebellion* or has the role of using something holy for a mundane purpose. A person should be holy inside and out, transparent, but one’s clothing allows him to “lie” and to be a complete degenerate on the inside while appearing as a respectable, perfectly good-looking person on the outside.

There is also clothing that brings respect to a person worthy of respect, such as royal clothing. Yet when a commoner dons this same clothing, he will be lying to everyone.

Words are the clothing for our thoughts. When we want to express an idea, we must “cloak” our thoughts in words to express them. The essence is the thought; the words are its cloak.

Just as the special clothing allowed Adam to hide his lowliness and to appear as a respectable person, so, too, Nimrod and Eisav, when they wore those garments, were able to cloak their low speech in “cloaks,”

*viz*, words that seemed acceptable and respectable. This is where they derived the power to persuade others of lies and nonsense with their power of speech. It was characteristic of the clothing that they were wearing.

It is also noteworthy that when Yaakov came to Yitzchak for his blessing wearing these very clothes, he also “hunted” his father Yitzchak with his words by seemingly telling him that that he was indeed Eisav. In this case however, the purpose was to restore the blessings to their rightful owner, Yaakov. So, in this one instance, the clothing allowed the truth to prevail.

In today’s world, this power of “hunting with words” constitutes a very powerful force in our society. The power of Eisav and Nimrod, to cloak low ideas in words that sound respectable and acceptable, plays a significant role in our society. We must be careful not to listen to it, for it will affect us negatively. We should listen instead, to the words of our Sages and holy Rabbis who only speak the truth and who have no agenda to fool the public, but only to help them.

This is another valuable lesson that we can learn from the “Generation of the Dispersement.”