

PARASHAT NOAH

The First World and the Second

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In parashat Noach we read of the great catastrophe which befell humanity in its earliest stages: all the creatures of the world died in the terrible flood. Amidst this disaster, though, a ray of hope rose and floated on the water - Noach's ark, carrying within it the surviving representatives of all animal species, thus facilitating their continuation and the renewal of the world.

If we analyze the difference between the two worlds - the one which existed before the flood and the other which came after - we find one main outstanding difference: In the new world, man is permitted to eat animals, in contrast to the norms which existed in the time of Adam, in the old world. While Adam was a vegetarian - "And the Lord said, Behold I have given you every plant... and every tree of which the fruit bears seed; it shall be to you for food" (1:29), Noach is permitted to eat animals: "Every moving thing which lives shall be to you for food, like the green plants, I have given you everything" (9:3). In light of the new dispensation to kill animals for food, the Torah immediately specifies two limitations: 1. "But flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat" (9:4) - this prohibition refers either to eating the limb of a living animal (according to Rashi) or to eating blood (according to the Ramban). 2. "And the blood of your lives shall I require... Whoever sheds man's blood by man shall his own blood be shed" (9:5-6) - the prohibition of murder. From the context it would appear that the Torah here is prohibiting the killing of a person in order to eat him.

Why is the eating of animals suddenly permitted here, despite the fact that it was prohibited in the old world? If God really wanted man to follow a vegetarian lifestyle and therefore allowed Adam to eat only plants, then why is man now allowed to eat animals? And if God doesn't really see vegetarianism as essential, why was eating meat originally prohibited?

It would certainly appear logical to connect this question with the basis for animal existence in the new world which appears after the flood. Their whole existence derives from having been saved by Noah and the ark that he built, and that, perhaps, explains their subjugation to their savior - even for the purposes of food.

However, I think this question regarding the difference between the two worlds is a more fundamental one, and the permission to eat the flesh of animals is an expression of a more significant and qualitative difference. The question we need to ask is the following: If the old world truly disappointed God, to the point where He had to destroy it, why did He allow the world to arise a second time? What guarantee was there that the same abysmal human behavior would not repeat itself? It seems reasonable to assume that there was some significant change in the new world, a change which God was forced to make in light of the first experiment which had failed.

Let us try to see the dispensation to eat meat as the key to understanding this significant difference between the two worlds. The eating of animal meat represents just one single result of this change in the world; let us explore the root of the matter.

We shall begin by comparing the description of the renewal of the world following the flood with the description of the creation of the first world. In our comparison, we shall focus specifically on the differences, by means of which we shall try to understand the nature and character of the new world.

The principal parallels are as follows:

Creation of the World (chapter 1)

"And the wind of God moved over the surface of the water" "Let it divide water from water" "Let the waters... be gathered to one place and the land will BE SEEN" "Fruit trees bearing fruit of their kind" "To distinguish between day and night" "And the Lord created Adam in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them" "'Redu' (Have dominion over) every living thing that moves on the earth"

Renewal of the World After the Flood (chapter 8)

"And God caused a wind to pass over the earth and the waters subsided" "The deep fountains and the windows of heaven were stopped" "In the tenth month on the first day of the month the tops of the mountains WERE SEEN" "And the dove came to him TOWARDS EVENING, and there was a plucked olive leaf in her mouth" "And God spoke to Noah saying: Go out of the ark, you..."

The Torah's description of the renewal of the world following the flood is clearly set out in a format which corresponds to the creation of the first world.

The clearest parallel in this regard concerns the blessings which God grants to Adam and to Noah - to Adam following his creation, and to Noah when he leaves the ark. This comparison is vitally important for our purposes, for these blessings include the permission to eat meat (in the case of Noah) or the directive to eat vegetation only (in the case of Adam). Let us examine these blessings:

God's Blessing to Adam (1:28-9)

"And the Lord blessed them and the Lord said to them: BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY, FILL THE EARTH AND SUBDUED IT, and HAVE DOMINION over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and every creature which moves on the earth. And the Lord said, Behold I have given you every plant which bears seed... it shall be to you for food."

God's Blessing to Noah (9:1-3)

"And the Lord blessed Noah and his sons, and He said to them: BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY AND FILL THE EARTH. And the FEAR AND DREAD OF YOU shall be upon all the creatures of the land and all the birds of the sky... Every moving thing which lives shall be to you for food, like the green plants, I have given you everything."

The language of the blessing given to Noah echoes that of the blessing given to Adam, almost word for word. Of special interest to us is the slight difference between them; the difference which points to either vegetarianism or the consumption of animal flesh. Our Sages pointed out this difference in the Midrash ([Bereishit Rabba, 34:12](#)): "And the fear and dread of you shall be..." - Fear and dread are mentioned here; dominion is not mentioned."

The "fear and dread" promised to Noah replace the "dominion" with which Adam is charged. What is the difference between these two terms?

The word "dominion" (*rediya*) as used in the Torah refers to rule. This may sometimes mean the type of rule which suppresses and subjugates its subjects, but fundamentally the term means to govern, to rule, without any negative connotation. For example, we read of the great feasts of King Solomon: "And Shlomo's provisions for one day were thirty kor of fine flour and sixty kor of meal, ten fat oxen and twenty oxen... For he had DOMINION OVER all this side of the river, from Tifsa to Azza, and over all the kings on this side of the river" (*Melakhim I 5:2-4*). Shlomo could permit himself provisions on a royal scale because he "had dominion" - i.e., governed and ruled - over the whole area on the western side of the Jordan.

Bearing this in mind, in God's blessing to Adam he is handed the reigns of rule over all the creatures of the world - the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the creatures which live on the land. It should be emphasized that in chapter 1, human dominion over the creatures is presented as the purpose of his very creation, as described even before the blessing: "And the Lord said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea..." (1:26).

In contrast, Noah's blessing lacks this element of rule, and in its place comes fear and dread. Man after the flood no longer rules over and governs the creatures of the world, even though God has granted him the highest degree of intelligence such that all creatures fear his abilities. Just as the deer fears the lion or the mouse fears the snake, because their speed and strength gives them an advantage, so will all the creatures of the world fear man because of his intelligence and cunning.

From the above discussion it becomes clear why the continuation of the blessing of rulership given to Adam did not permit the eating of animals, while the blessing of animal fear of humans given to Noach goes on to permit this. The responsibility of a king is to concern himself with the social order in his kingdom, to perform justice and righteousness and to take care of his subjects. So long as man's position involved ruling and governing the world, he clearly could not eat his subjects. Quite the contrary - his task was to ensure order in the world and harmony among all the creatures. However, when man failed in this task, ceasing to take care of order in God's world, the harmony of the entire system was disrupted: "And the Lord saw the land, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the land" (6:12).

Following this failure by man and the consequent corruption of the earth, God renews the world, but this time man is not given the same reigns of rulership. He has already proved himself incapable of this task; the attempt failed, and from now on his status will be different.

Man still has immense power - he still stands at the supreme summit of all of creaturehood and all the other creatures fear him, but he has descended from his great pedestal and is no longer their king. Within the organic food chain he can be defined as the strongest animal (owing to his intelligence and cunning), but he nevertheless remains a creature, preying on those weaker than himself. The moment that man becomes himself a part of nature, rather than a ruler over it, he follows this basic law of nature.

This new status of man also explains another difference between the two creations. In the beginning, the animal kingdom was created before the appearance of man, while in the second creation, man (Noach and his family) emerges from the ark before the animals. In the first world, where man had 'dominion' - ruled and governed over the animal kingdom - the Torah describes him as appearing in a world which was ready for him; all he had to do was to keep order. He was not part of this world; rather, he was placed in a position superior to it, a position of responsibility for it, as God's representative, His "minister of world affairs," as it were. "Let us make man in Our Image, in Our Likeness, and they will have dominion over the fish of the sea ... and the Lord created man in His image, in the image of God He created him." As such, man appears only at the conclusion of the creation of the world, when all the other creations are already in place.

In contrast, owing to the new status of Noach and his family, they are an integral part of those worldly creations, with no special status granting them rulership. Therefore, they do not appear in the world at the conclusion of its ordering, as rulers, but rather together with the other creatures, as members of the list of mammals.

And owing to man's new status, his sins will no longer lead to destruction of the entire world together with all its creatures, for he is now an autonomous being - "I shall no longer curse the land for man's sake, for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21).

This is man's new position in this new world. However, the conclusion of the story contains an optimistic hint at a point in time when this state of affairs will change, and return to the previous situation: "And Noah built an altar to God and took of all the pure animals and of all the pure birds, and offered up sacrifices on the altar" (8:20).

This concluding scene points us in the direction of another Chumash, with its own particular concepts and terminology - altar, pure animals and pure birds, offerings and a sweet savor to God. The mention of these concepts immediately reminds of the parshiot in Sefer Vayikra dealing with the sacrifices - the sacrifices offered in the mishkan and later in the Beit Ha-Mikdash. There Israel are destined to offer sacrifices to God, thereby in a way returning to man's original status from before the flood. Once again man stands as the representative of all of creation before God and asks for forgiveness; once again man takes animals and sacrifices them to God, rather than consuming them. And in the future, the situation will return to its previous state where even the animals will all be vegetarian: "And the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be food for the snake. They shall not cause harm or corruption in all My holy mountain, says God." (Yeshayahu 65:25. Compare 11:7).

(On the subject of vegetarianism in general and the relationship between man and animals in light of the dispensation to eat meat, see Rav Kook's "Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace".)

(Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

Further study: 1. Why was the first code of law - the seven Noachide laws - given to Noah and not to Adam? 2. Read the text of the post-flood "berit" (9:8-17). a. What is the position of Noah in relation to the rest of the world? b. Compare the berit to God's "speaking to himself" (8:21-22). c. Compare 9:9-10 (the berit) to 9:13 and 9:16-17 (the "ot berit," the meaning of the rainbow). What is the difference? Explain. 3. How does the story of Noah's drunkenness fit in with today's shiur?