

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
Parshat HaShavua  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

This parasha series is dedicated  
in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

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## PARASHAT NOACH

What Changed After the Flood?

By Rav Tamir Granot

### A. Introduction: The world after the Flood

God brought a great flood upon the world because He thought that such a world was not worthy of existence. Our parasha tells us:

"God saw the earth and behold, it was corrupted... The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is full of violence because of them".

But surely, if God had thought that the world was not worthy of existing at all, He would not have left Noach and his family, and the animals, alive. Their survival surely proves that God still wanted the world and man – but not the same world that existed before the Flood. Here a difficult problem arises: if the world after the Flood would be the same that existed previously, who could guarantee that it would not descend to the same abysmal state that it reached before the Flood? And if, indeed, this was a possible scenario, then what was the point of this repeat experiment, which did not ensure a chance of a better world? Furthermore, God promises that there will be no future Flood to destroy the world. If so, we must assume that God had more confidence in the new world than He had in the old one. Why?

In order for the world to be truly different, to have greater potential, it needs to develop on different foundations. Indeed, in His command to Noach, God establishes the "new world order." There are two principal aspects to this innovation:

- i. a new definition of the relationship between man and animals; and
- ii. a prohibition against spilling blood; i.e., a fundamental definition of inter-personal relations.

The verses teach as follows:

(1)God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth;

(2)and the fear and dread of you shall be upon all the creatures of the land and upon all the birds of the heaven; upon all with which the earth swarms, and upon all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.

(3)ALL MOVING THINGS THAT LIVE SHALL BE YOURS FOR FOOD; LIKE THE GREEN HERBS I HAVE GIVEN EVERYTHING TO YOU.

(4)BUT YOU SHALL NOT EAT FLESH WITH ITS LIFE – ITS BLOOD.

(5)AND YOUR BLOOD OF YOUR LIVES I SHALL REQUIRE; I SHALL REQUIRE IT AT THE HAND OF EVERY CREATURE, AND AT THE HAND OF MAN; AT THE HAND OF A PERSON'S BROTHER I SHALL REQUIRE A PERSON'S LIFE.

(6)WHOEVER SHEDS MAN'S BLOOD – BY MAN SHALL HIS OWN BLOOD BE SHED, FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN.

(7)And as to you – be fruitful and multiply; swarm abundantly in the land and multiply in it.

We have emphasized here, using upper case, the verses that would appear to contain the principal innovations of the parasha, as listed above. The innovation is especially noticeable against the background of what Adam is commanded, in Chapter 1:

(28)God blessed them and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heaven and all the creatures that swarm upon the earth".

(29)AND GOD SAID: "BEHOLD, I HAVE GIVEN TO YOU ALL THE SEED-BEARING HERBS THAT ARE UPON THE FACE OF THE EARTH, AND EVERY

FRUIT-BEARING TREE THAT BEARS ITS SEEDS WITHIN IT – IT SHALL BE FOR YOU FOR FOOD,

(30)AND FOR THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH AND FOR THE BIRDS OF THE HEAVENS AND FOR ALL THE CREEPING THINGS UPON THE EARTH THAT HAVE LIFE IN THEM – ALL THE GREEN HERBS SHALL BE FOR FOOD.' AND IT WAS SO.

The verses in our parasha, at the beginning of Chapter 9, certainly correspond to the above verses, either repeating or changing what they originally stated. In other words, the verses from Parashat Bereishit contain no prohibition against shedding blood, nor is there any license for man to eat meat; there, he is instructed to eat only plants.

In this shiur we shall examine the significance of this discrepancy between the original command and the new one in Parashat Noach, and try to understand why this change reflects the new foundations that give the world a better chance of not being corrupted.

## B. Another Look at the Chapter of Creation

In our shiur on Parashat Bereishit, we dwelled at length on the structure and order of Chapter 1, and its importance for an understanding of the status of each respective category of Creation. We concluded the shiur with two questions that we shall now address. Our principal difficulties arose concerning the relationship between the animal world and man, in light of their creation on the sixth day, and – especially – the status of the plant kingdom. We shall first address this latter issue.

Several indicators lead us to propose that the plant kingdom has no independent status, as far as the Torah is concerned, as arising from Chapter 1 of Bereishit:

.1In the previous shiur, we noted that the appearance of plants on the third day means that they do not belong to the "host" of the world – i.e., the creations for the sake of which the world was created. Rather, they belong to the framework and infrastructure themselves (the "heaven and the earth"), whose creation takes place during the first three days and is characterized by "dividing" (separating) and "calling" (naming).

.2The inclusion of the creation of the plant kingdom on the same day when the earth is created tells us that it is not an independent creation with a special unit of time devoted to it. Plants are created as a continuation of the formation of the earth, which was separated and given a name on the third day; therefore, it is to be perceived as part of it.

Tradition awards a special status to the third day because the words "ki tov (it was good)" appear twice on this day. On the simplest level, we may explain that because there are two creations on this day, there are correspondingly two expressions of Divine approval.

.3Furthermore, the language of the text itself shows that the Torah does not regard the creation of the plant kingdom as an independent act, but rather as the actualization of the potential contained in the earth:

God said: Let the earth bring forth grass... and it was so... The earth brought forth grass, seed-bearing herbs after their kind... and God saw that it was good. (11-12)

We do not read that "God made the grass," or "there was grass," as is the case in the rest of the creations; there is certainly no "God created grass." Rather, we are told that God told the earth to bring forth grass from within itself, and it did so, as commanded. This formulation emphasizes the relationship between the ground and the plants, with the latter perceived as a part – and outgrowth – of the former. To clarify this point further, we may compare this description with that of the creation of the animals. At the beginning of the creation of the fish, we read: "Let the waters swarm abundantly... and let birds fly...." Here, one could still claim that there is a parallel between the water 'swarming' with – bringing forth – fish and the ground bringing forth vegetation. But the continuation of the text decisively cancels any further parallel: "God created the great reptiles...." In other words, the water did not swarm with fish by virtue of its own power; rather, there was a distinct, independent creation which – as we explained in the previous shiur – could not have evolved from the preceding situation through natural causality. As we understand it, the expression "let the waters swarm abundantly" means that fish should swarm abundantly in the water, not that they should be brought forth by the water.

Concerning the animals upon the earth, we read: "Let the land bring forth living creatures after their kind." Here, there is a perfect parallel to what we are told concerning the fish. In other words, the land brings them forth. But the continuation draws a distinction: "God made the animals of the earth after their kind." Unlike the wording involving the plants, we do not read here "The land brought forth living creatures," but rather "God made".

One may debate at length the scientific, physical, or biological significance of the differences between plants and animals, and between both of these and inanimate objects. I believe that such a debate would add nothing to our understanding of the Torah here. The Torah does not mean to establish that a living organism is qualitatively different, botanically or biologically, from an inanimate object, whereas a plant is not. It is certainly clear that the processes of growth, fertilization, and life itself, which exist among plants, make a qualitative differentiation between plants and the inanimate world. What the Torah wishes to establish here is its status. The status is established through the language of the Torah's narrative, but its significance must be sought somewhere in between the realms of ontology and ethics. In other words, there is a question as to our perception of this specific "something" (ontology), and there is a question as to the appropriate approach towards it (ethics). And the Torah

asserts, in this latter regard, that plants share the same status as inanimate objects. I.e., the significance of its existence is defined in terms of its importance for the creations that will be described later on, rather than for its own sake. From an ethical point of view, the fact that a plant embodies living characteristics that are obviously absent from inanimate objects, does not add to it, but rather detracts: it becomes food. Life exists upon the land and by virtue of the plants. The third day prepares the possibility of the existence of the life forms that will appear on the fifth day and – especially – on the sixth day. This being the case, we discover the answer to one of the questions that we raised in the previous shiur, concerning the discrepancy between the Divine utterances and the days of Creation. Plants are created with their own separate utterance because, both objectively and functionally, they are quite different from the inanimate earth. But the two creations appear on the same day (the third day) because the status of plants, despite the above – or perhaps because of it – is exactly the same as that of the earth. It is an instrument for the existence of the animals that are yet to be created, and nothing more.

According to what we have said, the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," which must be understood as referring to all of the first three days during which the "heavens and the earth" were created, also refer to the plants. In a similar manner, the void and chaos reveals from within itself its diverse elements. The water that is above the firmament is separated from the gathering of water that is here; and the latter is separated from the dry land which it had covered; and the land reveals that it contains an inanimate element along with a live element. It is a process of covert, less explicit differentiation, but nevertheless a process of revealing within itself.

Let us now try to understand the internal relations amongst the categories of living things. Both man and animals are told by God to eat plants. In the previous shiur, we showed that at least the utterance aimed at the animals is an "utterance of Creation" – i.e., a law of nature. Therefore, we conclude that animals were created as herbivores. Was man created a vegetarian, or did God instruct him to be this way? We are inclined to adopt the latter option. In any event, man and animals exist side by side, both living on plants. Man is commanded to rule over the animal world, to conquer it, but he is forbidden to use it. Eating something represents absolute destruction; the food that is eaten becomes part of the eaten, it is altogether nullified. The command to rule shows that the fact that the animals are not to be eaten does not cancel the inner hierarchy within the world of living things. Man is awarded rulership. This may also lay the foundation for the possibility of his harnessing the power of animals. But this is not a hierarchy of subject and object. It is a kingdom whose subjects are all entitled to life and dignity, but there is a clear distinction between the rulers and the ruled. The over-arching principle of this kingdom is life itself. Anything that is alive is entitled to belong to this kingdom. Anyone who also embodies a spark of God is also entitled to be a ruler. Everything else is considered the "goods" of this kingdom; it is property, and it is there for the use of its citizens – the living things.

### C. The Change in the Status of the Creations after the Flood, and Its Significance

In the normative sense, we focused above on the changes in two respects: the license to eat meat, and the prohibition against shedding blood.

Let us first address the latter change. The Torah does not introduce an innovation here in the prohibition against killing another person; rather, it changes the reason and basis for the prohibition. According to Chapter 1 of Bereishit, in the ideal world that preceded the Flood, life itself was worthy of dignity and protection. As we have said: all living things were "citizens of the kingdom." The prohibition against spilling blood is a comprehensive one, including not only the human sphere, but the entire range of living things. The license to eat plants is the other side of this coin. The prohibition against shedding the blood of any living thing becomes, among the living things, a law of nature, and for man it is the overarching law of morality. In Chapter 9, which outlines the principles for existence after the Flood, the Torah renews humanism. Humanism, according to the Torah's teaching here, is a limiting principle rather than an inclusive one. It is the "ism" of humanness, which removes from its scope any life that is not human. We may say – humanism instead of "zooism." What makes humanity unique, according to Chapter 1, is the fact that he is created "in God's image." But now, after the Flood, the "image of God" is no longer the basis for the command to conquer and rule the animal kingdom as man was commanded in Chapter 1 (i.e., the characteristic of leadership); rather, it is the basis for the prohibition against shedding blood. In the new kingdom – in which the animals are no longer citizens – the "image of God" is the precondition for obtaining the status of a citizen, not the precondition for rulership.

What is the significance of this change? Why does God re-define the status of citizenship within the living kingdom? In order to understand this, we must also address the second change: the license to consume animal flesh. Attention should be paid to the fact that even when the Torah permits the eating of animals, this license does not extend to the essence of their vitality: "But flesh with its life – its blood – you shall not eat." In other words, the blood is its spirit, the vital element (not a soul, not the image of God, but life) – and this can not be eaten. Without blood, a living thing would actually be an inanimate object.

Still – animals are now permitted as food. And since they are now permitted as food, we may assume that something changed in the nature of animals, such that now some animals were carnivores and ate other animals, rather than just plants. A priori, we may understand this change in two mutually opposing ways. One possibility is that man's status as ruler by virtue of the image of God within him, was now removed from him. When man was ruler, he was forbidden to eat animals – because the rulers have no right to devour the citizens of their kingdom. As we have said, there was a hierarchy, but no license for use or exploitation. In the wake of man's sin, he can no longer be the ruler of the world, and therefore he can no longer be expected to maintain such a scrupulous standard in his attitude towards the animals. The removal of this moral demand of man is an expression of God's understanding that the level He set for man was too high.

The other possibility is that the status of animals as creations with independent dignity and purpose was removed from them, and they were now considered like the plants, which had no purpose except for man's use. As the verse reads, "Like the green herbs, I have given you everything" – not only legally, but also in terms of the understanding of animal status as equal to that of plants.

Veteran VBM readers may remember that a few years ago, my friend and colleague, Rav Yonatan Grossman, proposed the former possibility for understanding the parasha. I have also proposed this several times in shiurim delivered orally. The reason for preferring this approach arises from the differences between the blessing given to Adam and the blessing given to Noach. A quick review of the verses, as quoted at the beginning of this shiur, reveals immediately that aside from the similar blessing of being fertile and multiplying, the formulation of the two blessings is different. Adam is commanded to "...Fill the earth and conquer it, and rule..." while Noach is told, "The fear and terror of you shall be upon all the creatures of the earth... and all the fish of the sea are given into your hand".

Relations of rulership and responsibility have been exchanged for aggressive relations based on fear. In order to understand this difference and its significance, let us quote Rav Grossman from the aforementioned shiur:

This being the case, in God's blessing to Adam he is awarded reign over all the creatures of the world – the fish of the seas, the birds of the skies, and every animal that swarms upon the earth. It should be emphasized that in Chapter 1, man's rule over animals is presented as the purpose of man's creation. It is noted even before the blessing: "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, that they may rule over the fish of the sea...'" (verse 26.)

Despite this, in the blessing to Noach this rulership is missing; instead we find fear, terror, and fright (5). Man after the Flood is not the leader and king of the creatures of the world – even if God has given him greater intelligence, such that the creatures are afraid of his traps and weapons.

Just as the deer is afraid of the lion or the mouse is afraid of the snake, because their power and speed help them to catch their prey, so all the creatures of the world are destined to fear man, whose intelligence and sophistication give him the advantage.

Now it is clear why the continuation of the blessing of kingship, bestowed on Adam, could not permit the consumption of animal flesh, while God's blessing to Noah – concerning the animals' fear of him – goes on to allow him to eat meat. The role of a king is to look after social order in the kingdom, to perform justice and righteousness, to care for his subjects. So long as man's role in the world is defined as the king and ruler, it is clear that he cannot devour his subjects. Quite the opposite: he must look after the animals and maintain harmony among them. But when man fails in his role and ceases to take maintain order in God's world, harmony is interrupted throughout the world, throughout the animals kingdom: "God saw the land and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the land" (6:12.)

After this failure on man's part, and after the world has become corrupt, God renews His world – but this time, refrains from giving man the reigns of control. It has already become clear that this role is a difficult one for him, the experiment failed, and from now onwards man's status will be different. He will still have great power, and he is still the most important of all the animals – indeed, all creatures are afraid of him – but he has given up his throne and is no longer their king. Within the organic food chain, man is now defined as the strongest animal (because of his intelligence and cunning), but he is no more than that – an animal that devours those weaker than him (end of quote from Yonatan Grossman's shiur from a few years ago.)

I would like to present an alternative understanding of the change in Chapter 9. Man remains the image of God. Proof of this is that the Torah immediately goes on to emphasize once again the religious and moral significance of his status. What has changed is that the status of the animals has been lowered, to that of plants. From now, man may make use of animals; they are no longer citizens of his kingdom. This development is related to the selection of a smaller group, and the establishment of its identity on the basis of a unique common denominator which does not exist amongst the larger group. I believe that this process should be viewed as paralleling what happens during the course of Sefer Bereishit, with the selection of Avraham and his descendants. The diminishing scope of those in God's focus – i.e., a diminishing of the kingdom – allows greater demands to be placed upon its citizens. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai expresses this trend in his harsh assertion, "You are called 'man,' whereas the pagan nations of the world are not called 'man'" (Bava Batra). In other words, what we have here is a new civil identity, which comes to nullify the preceding situation. This, to my mind, also explains quite simply God's demand that the world after the Flood not return to its previous corruption. The new kingdom, whose over-arching principle is "the image of God," and not just "life," will certainly have more stringent norms – just as the Kingdom of Israel is required to maintain more stringent norms than the kingdom of the rest of humanity. Thus, the perception of man as a living creature, and that he may therefore not be harmed, does not necessarily contradict the possibility of offering him as a sacrifice. Just as in the world that preceded the Flood an animal sacrifice could be brought – as happens, in fact, when Hevel brings the finest of his herd – so human sacrifice is also theoretically possible. Cannibalism is forbidden, but a person may be brought as a sacrifice. It is the definition of mankind in terms of his representing the image of God that completely nullifies this possibility.



While according to the first explanation the change that takes place after the Flood arises from a recognition of the lowering of man's status, the second explanation sees the change not as a reaction to the situation but rather an attempt to mold a different world for the future. Humanism is not regression, but rather transcendence. Admittedly, the ascent involves relinquishing the citizenship of animals in our kingdom. But the issue is not a psychological or sociological one: i.e., in order that man will not relate to his fellow man as an animal, the difference must be recognizable. Rather, the new situation represents the establishment of a new and higher standard of citizenship; a new, loftier principle – and this in turn implies a lowering of the relative status of animals.

For further thought:

The "Nazir" – Rav David Cohen, himself a vegetarian, brings together a number of important and beautiful thoughts gathered from the writings of Rav Kook in a booklet entitled, "Chazon ha-Tzimchonut ve-ha-Shalom" (The Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace). I believe that the line we have adopted in this shiur should be understood in light of the historical didactic that is so characteristic of Rav Kook's work, and whose movement is as follows:



The first generalization is the "thesis" – the primal situation in which animals were also included. The separation comes about after the Flood, creating an "antithesis" based upon a partitioning of a section of the general entity, while maintaining a relationship with it. The third situation is one of return to generalization, i.e., the vision of vegetarianism, after the antithesis has already created a humanness upon a higher foundation that may perhaps allow a movement of return to the animals.

Notes:

[1]Even if we adopt the view according to which the prohibition here is not to consume the blood but rather to eat a limb from a living animal (Chazal in Sanhedrin), the idea is the same.

Translated by Kaeren Fish