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**Parashat Noach**

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## MA'AMIN VE'EINO MA'AMIN?

by *Rabbi Ezra Wiener*

We are certainly familiar with statements of our Sages and lengthy discussions of the commentaries that question the character of Noach and scrutinize even the accolade that the Torah ascribes to him, "Tamim Hayah BeDorotav," "He was upstanding in his generation" (Bereishit 6:9, cf. Rashi). Nonetheless, even those who interpret "Tamim Hayah BeDorotav" as a discredit do not express any indignation regarding Noach's degree of faith, nor is there any sentiment of ignoble character. He distinguished himself from the ambient society and ostensibly erected proper safeguards for himself and his family to preclude any degradation of moral standards; he was able to militate for G-dly behavior against the ebb of the prevalent current of depravity.

However, Rashi's comments on the following Pesukim paint a less virtuous picture of Noach. The Torah describes: "*VeNoach Ben Sheish Mei'ot Shanah VeHaMabul Hayah Mayim Al HaAretz. VaYavo Noach UVanav Velsho UN'shei Vanav Ito El HaTeivah MiPenei Mei HaMabul,*" "Noach was six hundred year old, and the floodwaters came on the earth. Noach, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives went into the Ark in the face of the floodwaters" (BeReishit 7:6-7). Rashi (7:7 s.v. MiPenei Mei HaMabul) writes: "Af Noach MiKetanei Amanah Hayah, Ma'amin VeEino Ma'amin SheYavo HaMabul VeLo Nichnas LaTeivah Ad SheDechakuhu HaMayim," "Noach too had little faith, only half-believing that the flood would come, and [accordingly, 'In the face of the floodwaters' implies that] he did not enter the Ark until the rising waters forced him to do so." Imagine if we were Ma'amin VeEino Ma'amin, half-believers, regarding the arrival of Mashi'ach or Torah MiSinai. Such heretical beliefs would forfeit a person his share in the next world, or even his status as Jew for certain areas of Halachah. Have we grossly misinterpreted the character of Noach? Has the Tzaddik Tamim of the beginning of the Parashah radically transformed himself into a heretic? Have the threats of the flood and the destruction of mankind suddenly caused Noach to become a dubious believer and overcome by skepticism?

Radak (ibid.) vehemently opposes Rashi's interpretation. The need for an exegetical interpretation of the superfluous phrase "MiPenei Mei HaMabul" remains in place, but to assume that these words denote a less-than-faithful Noach, Radak argues, is an erroneous deduction. Radak chooses to interpret the word "MiPenei" not as "because of" but rather like the word "Lifnei" — meaning "before." Thus, the Pasuk informs the reader that Noach entered the Teivah with his family well *before* the waters began to cover the earth; in fact, Radak argues, he entered the Ark seven days prior to the flood. According to this reading, we cannot possibly understand those who posit that Noach was of little faith, as the text testifies to the fact that Noach was righteous and wholehearted. In addition, Radak notes that a mere Pasuk earlier (7:5) we are told "VaYa'as Noach KeChol Asher Tzivahu Hashem," "Noach did all that G-d commanded him." It is certainly difficult to reconcile this Pasuk with the interpretation of Rashi.

I would like to offer a defense of Rashi and an interpretation that not only serves to maintain the noble reputation of Noach, and thus silences those who place him in disrepute, but in contradistinction, actually highlights an honorable trait of Noach. Noach's lack of Emunah was not an incomplete faith in G-d's omnipotence to bring a Mabul, nor was it a

challenge as to whether the vast majority of humanity deserved to be eliminated. Rather, Noach had so much faith in G-d's attribute of mercy that he believed G-d would recant, as He so often did, and perhaps give even more time for repentance. Perhaps Noach also believed in humanity. This is no different than Avraham Avinu petitioning Hashem on behalf of Sedom. Avraham also believed in G-d's willingness to reconsider. Perhaps one could posit that Noach should have also petitioned G-d as did Avraham, and his silence in this regard should place his reputation below that of Avraham Avinu. Nonetheless, Ma'amin Ve'eino Ma'amin is far from a heretical stance. It speaks more to Noach's belief than to his disbelief. It emphasizes his belief in G-d's mercy and his belief in man's ability to repent at the final hour, even as the floodwaters advanced on his Ark. It is this very virtue, his faith in man, that earned him the titles of "Tzaddik" and "Tamim" that are attributed to him at the beginning of the Parashah.

## "I THOUGHT IT WAS OKAY"

by *Yonatan Sragov* ("18)

When the flood ended on the 27th of Mar-Cheshvan (according to Rabi Eliezer), Hashem gave Noach the seven Mitzvot that all non-Jews are obligated to observe, the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach, Seven Noahide laws. However, in contrast to the Jewish people's verbal acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai, which is narrated by the Midrash (Tanchuma Parashat Noach Siman 3) based on "Na'aseh VeNishma," "We will do and we will listen" (Shemot 24:7), the Midrash does not narrate a non-Jewish verbal acceptance of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach at Har Ararat, as we might expect. After all, the Midrash that recounts our acceptance of the Torah is used to obligate every Jew in all 613 Mitzvot; since every Jew was either physically or symbolically present at Har Sinai, every Jew accepted all of the Mitzvot. How can it be that a parallel Midrash does not exist regarding the acceptance of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach? Seemingly, the Midrash is the impetus for the individual's personal accountability in keeping the Mitzvot. An obligation cannot simply be inherited; one must obligate himself or herself, and if not, theoretically one should not be faulted for any Aveirot he or she performs.

In addition, while the Torah specifically tells us that Hashem spoke to both Noach and his sons to command them in these seven respects, it specifically omits their wives, when the women had been included in all other commands regarding the Teivah. If the women were not included in the giving of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach, what obligates them to keep them? In addition, why are future generations not exempt from honoring the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach? After all, there is no clear textual or Midrashic evidence that suggests that all non-Jews were present at the time of the inception of the Seven Noahide Laws.

An answer to these questions may emerge from an interesting rule regarding a Beit Din that wishes to prosecute a non-Jew for a violation of one of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach. The Gemara Sanhedrin (57b) rules that in contrast to the case of a Jew who violates one of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach, who cannot be killed for his violation unless he received Hatra'ah (a warning prior to the crime detailing the severity of the punishment), a non-Jew who violates one of the Seven Laws can be killed even if he did not receive Hatra'ah. Generally, Hatra'ah is required to verify that the sinner understood the seriousness of what he was doing, for without it, the sinner could claim that he did not realize his actions were forbidden, and the Beit Din would not be allowed to penalize him.

Why is Hatra'ah not required when punishing a non-Jew for a violation of the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach? Perhaps the answer is that no one would ever be believed if he claimed he was of the opinion that any of these acts were perfectly fine to do. For who could in all sincerity argue that robbery, murder, or adultery would not be in contrast with the

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proper way to act; these acts are obviously forbidden! Therefore, there is no need for the sinner in this case to receive Hatra'ah, as it is presumed that the sinner did the act with full knowledge.

Perhaps this idea can be extended to explain the irregularities in the "Matan Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach," the giving of the Seven Noahide Laws. There were no miracles, like those of Har Sinai, no sound and light show, and no future generations symbolically present, because it was not meant to be an earth-shattering set of revelations. Hashem was not telling Noah and his sons anything they did not know already. Therefore, non-Jews today are not obligated to avoid theft, murder, and adultery because Hashem commanded them to avoid these actions—they may not be aware of the existence of these rules, and they may not even believe in Hashem at all! But it does not matter. They are obligated not to do these things simply because they should know better.

This explanation has broad implications for us as Jews, too. It is known that many Mitzvot are not obvious or intuitive. But for the ones that are, we must be careful to observe them without excuse, just as the non-Jews must. We must ask from ourselves no less than we expect from our neighbors. Just as ignorance is no excuse for them, so too it should not be an excuse for us with regard to these Mitzvot. Let us remove from our vocabulary the words "I thought it was okay." Our hearts know right from wrong.

## AVRAHAM AND THE Idols

by Yaakov Zinberg ('18)

Avraham Avinu enters the biblical narrative at the end of Parashat Noach. The details in this brief section are limited: We are told only that Avraham (who is married to Sarah and does not yet have children) is one of the three sons of Terach, who decided to relocate his family from Ur Casdim to Kena'an but instead settled in Charan. Immediately following this, at the beginning of Parashat Lech Lecha, God speaks directly to Avraham, ordering him to travel from Charan to an unnamed land where he will receive great reward. The Torah is silent on why God specifically chose Avraham to complete this mission and be the progenitor of a "great nation."

There is clearly a need for some sort of backstory explaining Avraham Avinu's life in Ur Casdim and his selection by God, and Chazal filled this void by creating the now-famous Midrash concerning Avraham and his father's idols.<sup>1</sup> The Midrash, which appears most comprehensively in BeReishit Rabbah (38:13), reads as follows:

Terach was a worshipper of idols. One time he had to travel, and he left Avraham in charge of his store ... A woman entered carrying a dish full of flour. She said to [Avraham], "Offer it before [the idols]." Avraham took a club, broke all the idols, and placed the club in the hands of the tallest idol. When his father returned, he asked, "Who did all of this?" Avraham replied: "What have I to hide from you? A woman came carrying a dish of flour and told me to offer it before [the idols]. I did, and one of them said 'I will eat it first,' and another said 'I will eat it first.' The tallest one rose, took a club, and smashed the rest of them." Terach said: "What, do you think you can fool me? They aren't capable of thought!" Avraham said, "Do your ears hear what your mouth is saying?" Terach took Avraham and delivered him to [King] Nimrod. He said [to Avraham], "Let us worship the fire." Avraham said to him, "Let us worship water, for it extinguishes fire." Nimrod agreed, "Let us worship water." Avraham continued, "If so, let us worship the clouds, which provide water." ... Nimrod replied: "Your words are meaningless—I only worship fire. I will throw you into it, and the God you worship can save you from it." [Avraham's brother] Haran was hidden and considered his options, saying

[to himself], "If Avraham is victorious, I will say I am with Avraham, and if Nimrod is victorious, I will say I am with Nimrod." When Avraham was thrown into the fiery furnace and saved, they asked [Haran], "With whom are you?" He replied, "I am with Avraham." They took him and threw him into the fire, and his insides burned up and he died before his father Terach, as it says, "Haran died in the face of his father Terach" (BeReishit 11:28).

This Midrash is multifaceted and contains the following seven elements:

- 1) Terach is a worshipper of idols.
- 2) Avraham rejects Avodah Zarah by destroying his father's idols and ridiculing Avodah Zarah in front of both Terach and Nimrod.
- 3) Nimrod is king.
- 4) Nimrod worships fire.
- 5) Nimrod throws Avraham into a fiery furnace for his religious beliefs.
- 6) Avraham is saved from the furnace by a miracle of God.
- 7) Haran dies in the conflict.

Only elements 1 and 3 appear explicitly in Tanach. Yehoshua begins his farewell address to Bnei Yisrael by recounting their origins: "Beyond the river your ancestors always dwelled—Terach, the father of Avraham and Nachor—and they served other gods. But I took your father Avraham from beyond the river and led him all the way across the land of Kena'an" (Yehoshua 24:2-3). This Pasuk, in fact, is quoted in the Haggadah to prove that our ancestors were initially idol worshippers, but that beginning with Avraham Avinu, they served God. As for element 3, the Torah records earlier in Parashat Noach that Nimrod was a "mighty hunter" whose kingdom encompassed much of Mesopotamia (BeReishit 10:8-10). Chazal assume that Ur Casdim was located in Nimrod's domain, so Terach and Avraham were subject to Nimrod's authority.<sup>2</sup>

The other elements of the Midrash, however, are not explicit and must be inferred from the text. Elements 5 and 6 emerge from the unusual phraseology of a Pasuk in Lech Lecha and a parallel story in Sefer Daniel. Immediately before the Brit Bein HaBetarim, God assures Avraham that his descendants will inherit Kena'an, saying, "I am Hashem who took you out ("Hotzeiticha") from Ur Casdim to give you this land as an inheritance" (BeReishit 15:7). As Ramban notes, the word "Hotzeiticha" connotes a miracle (as opposed to the more mundane "Lekachticha"); the same word is used by God at Har Sinai to describe His taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt (Shemot 20:2), which, of course, involved many miracles. And what was the miracle performed for Avraham? Chazal interpreted the Pasuk in Lech Lecha to mean that God performed a miracle and took Avraham out of the "fire of Casdim," since the word "Ur" can mean fire (e.g. Yechezkel 5:2, which reads, "Shelishit BaUr Tav'ir," "burn one third in an Ur." Clearly, "Ur" means fire in this context). But the notion that Avraham was saved specifically from a furnace is borrowed from Sefer Daniel (Daniel 3:1-30). Chananyah, Misha'eil, and Azaryah were three young men who had been taken from Eretz Yisrael to Bavel (Babylon) and were selected as advisers to King Nevuchadnetzar. When the three advisers refused to bow to a golden statue Nevuchadnetzar had erected, the king ordered for them to be tied up and thrown into a fiery furnace. Yet the fire had no effect on the trio; even their clothing did not smell like fire (Daniel 3:27). Both the three advisers and Avraham refused to perform Avodah Zarah in the face of a mighty king, and Chazal deepened the connection by having Avraham also thrown into a fiery furnace as a punishment for defying Avodah Zarah. Thus, God tells Avraham, "I am Hashem who took you out from the fiery furnace of Casdim."<sup>3</sup>

Element 4, Nimrod's worship of fire, is more complicated. The Gemara (Eiruvim 53a) attributes the name "Nimrod" to the fact that Nimrod caused the world to rebel against God's reign ("Nimrod"

<sup>2</sup> The consensus among modern day Bible scholars is that Ur Casdim was located in Southern Mesopotamia, as were the various regions listed in Parashat Noach as being part of Nimrod's kingdom.

<sup>3</sup> One of the six uses in Tanach of "Ur" as a word for fire appears in Yeshayah 31:9. The Pasuk reads, "Asher Lo Ur BeTzion VeTanur Lo BiYrushalayim," "Who has a fire in Tziyon and a furnace in Yerushalayim" (the Pasuk refers to Hashem). The parallelism between "Ur," fire, and "Tanur," furnace, supports this element of the Midrash, since it indicates that the word "Ur" is synonymous with "furnace." It is possible that Chazal were aware of this Pasuk when creating the Midrash and felt it confirmed the aforementioned reading of the Pasuk in Lech Lecha.

<sup>1</sup> I use the collective "Chazal" to refer to those who contributed to the creation of this Midrash. Midrashim, especially those as elaborate as ours, usually do not have one single author; rather, they are often the accumulation of several ideas and develop over the course of many years.



The two most prominent Rishonim who directly address this issue are Rav Yehudah HaLevi (Kuzari 2:20) and the Ba'al HaMa'or (Rosh HaShanah 5a in the pages of the Rif, s.v. Ki Salik), who state that the date line is located 90 degrees east of Jerusalem. The Ba'al HaMa'or explains his position based on a passage that appears in Rosh Hashana 20b regarding the topic of Kiddush HaChodesh, the sanctification of the new month.

The Ba'al HaMa'or explains that Beit Din has until noon on the day they see the Molad, new moon, to declare Rosh Chodesh on that same day. However, if Beit Din's announcement comes after noon, Rosh Chodesh is on the next day. The Ba'al HaMa'or reasons that in order for a day to be retroactively declared Rosh Chodesh in the middle of that day in Jerusalem, that same day must be beginning somewhere else in the world. At noon in Jerusalem—18 hours into the Jewish day, starting from sunset—the sun is setting and the Jewish day beginning 18 hours west of Jerusalem, which is 270 degrees west of Jerusalem, or 90 degrees east of Jerusalem, since every hourly time zone is 15 degrees wide. Therefore, writes the Ba'al HaMa'or, the Halachic Date Line must be at the "Ketzei HaMizrach" (literally "eastern edge"), 90 degrees east of Jerusalem.

The Chazon Ish bases his ruling primarily on this assertion of the Kuzari and the Ba'al HaMa'or.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, though, that many Rishonim, including both Rashi (Rosh HaShanah 20b s.v. Nolad Kodem Chatzot) and Tosafot (op. cit. s.v. Chatzot), do not agree with the Kuzari's and Ba'al HaMa'or's interpretation of Rosh HaShanah 20b. The Chazon Ish argues that while Rashi and Tosafot reject the Kuzari's and Ba'al HaMa'or's interpretation of Rosh HaShanah 20b, Rashi and Tosafot do agree with the assertion that the Halachic date line lies 90 degrees east of Jerusalem. The Chazon Ish argues that this view is an undisputed Mesorah (tradition) from ancient times.

#### *Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's 180-Degree Opinion*

Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky composed an entire treatise on the subject of the Halachic date line entitled HaYomam BeKadur HaAretz. His 180-degree opinion is based on Yechezkel 38:12, which describes Eretz Yisrael/Yerushalayim as "Tabur HaAretz," the center of the world. Radak to this Pasuk translates the phrase "Tabur HaAretz" as "stomach of the land"; Israel lies in the middle of the world, just as the stomach lies in the middle of the body.

#### *Rav Tukachinsky's Logic*

Rav Tukachinsky and the Chazon Ish engaged in a ferocious and extended battle of arguments both in writing and in person. We present some of the highlights of their arguments in order to allow our readers to sense the intensity of this classic debate. Rav Tukachinsky argues that just as there must be a date line, there must be a center from which the date line measures. Rav Tukachinsky views it as intuitive and obvious (without a need to cite explicit sources from Chazal) that Jerusalem should be the prime meridian and that 180 degrees from Jerusalem is the anti-meridian/date line.

Moreover, he finds it highly counterintuitive to divide the world 90 degrees east of Jerusalem and 270 degrees west of Jerusalem. He cites the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 2:4) as support. The Yerushalmi states that there are 365 "windows" (Rav Tukachinsky understands this as the rough equivalent of what we call "degrees"), of which 182 are in the east, 182 are in the west, and one is in the middle.

Rav Yechiel Michel supports his view from a Sefer written by a Rishon, the Yesod Olam (2:17), which dismisses 90 degrees east of Jerusalem as the date line. The Yesod Olam argues that if this was the date line, it would cut through land and would lead to the absurdity of it being one day on one side of a street and another day on the other side of the street. For example, it would intersect Dongfeng Street in Changchun, China. Families on the eastern strip of Dongfeng Street would recite Kiddush while families a block to the west would recite Havdalah. It may be possible for those who want two days of Shabbat to walk one block eastbound down Dongfeng Street after Seudah Shlishit and start Shabbat again. Those who want to skip almost all of Shabbat could take a short stroll westbound and go from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. The Yesod Olam argues that the Halachah does not tolerate such a situation.

Rav Tukachinsky believes that the Yesod Olam rejects the Ba'al HaMa'or/Kuzari approach, opening the possibility of an alternative, namely 180 degrees from Jerusalem. This date line does not, for the most part, run through land (Alaska is a major exception), thereby avoiding the Yesod Olam's concern.

The Chazon Ish, however, believes that the Yesod Olam accepts the view that the date line runs 90 degrees east of Jerusalem. Yesod Olam, in the Chazon Ish's view, merely bends the date line from 90 degrees east to the eastern coasts of Siberia, China, and Australia, where the line would otherwise have crossed land. The Chazon Ish views the sea-coast as an intuitive and plausible border for the date line. Rav Tukachinsky dismisses the Chazon Ish's bending of the date line to the eastern edges of Siberia, China, and Australia as artificial and baseless.

Rav Yechiel Michel understands Rashi's alternative approach to Rosh Hashanah 20b as rejecting the Kuzari/Ba'al HaMa'or approach. He notes many Rishonim who explain Rosh HaShanah 20b differently than the Ba'al HaMa'or/Kuzari and who must therefore reject 90 degrees from Jerusalem as the date line.

Rav Tukachinsky understands the Ba'al HaMa'or and Kuzari as holding their opinion only at a time when known human habitation was limited to the "Old World" of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Since only half of the globe was known to be populated, it made sense for the date line to lie at the end of the inhabited portion of the world (i.e. 90 degrees from Jerusalem). He argues that in modern times, when all of the earth is inhabited, the entire globe must be considered when establishing the date line (i.e. 180 degrees from Jerusalem).

Rav Tukachinsky concludes "Jerusalem is our Greenwich," and thus, since Jerusalem is the Halachic prime meridian, the Halachic date line must be 180 degrees from it. He wonders what the Halachic significance of China could possibly be for the date line to run through it, and he wonders why 180 degrees from China could possibly serve as the Halachic prime meridian.

Alaska poses a difficulty to Rav Tukachinsky—his approach follows the Yesod Olam's avoidance of the date line running through a community and therefore prefers the date line to run through the sea. However, the 180-degree line runs through the middle of Alaska. Rav Yechiel Michel suggests the date line would run along the western Alaskan coast.

It is significant to note that Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Eidut LeYisrael p.119) rules in accordance with Rav Tukachinsky.

#### *Conclusion*

Next week, we will *iy"H* conclude our review of the debate concerning the Halachic date line with a summary of the Chazon Ish's response to Rav Tukachinsky's assertions.

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<sup>7</sup> The Chazon Ish presents his opinion in his Kuntruss Yud Chet Sha'ot, which is included in his commentary on the Orach Chayim section of the Shulchan Aruch.