

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 1

לקוטי שיחות · חלק א

Parshas Noach

פרשת נח

3 sichas in this booklet

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TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

A Giant Mikveh!

ויהי הגשם על הארץ ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Noach, p. 4ff, sections 1-3. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Bereishis 5713 (1952).

The point: *The Mabul was not only a punishment; it purified the world, forty days like a mikveh of forty se'ah. A mikveh works through bitul (the letters of "tevilah" also spell "habitul"). Parnassah worries, called "mayim rabim," work the same way: they wash away what shouldn't be there and make a person a keli for kedushah. Since it is a cleansing and not a punishment, once a person takes the inner point to heart, it can all happen in one moment.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ According to Torah Ohr, what did the Mabul do besides punishing?

It purified the world. Before the Mabul the land was impure, and the Mabul made it pure. (§1)

- ★ Why did the rain of the Mabul last forty days?

Like a mikveh, which must hold forty se'ah. (§1)

- ★★ Why are the waters of the Mabul called "Mei Noach"?

Noach means "nayacha d'rucha," rest and satisfaction of the spirit (Torah Ohr, on the posuk in

Yeshayahu 54:9). (§1)

- ★★ What is the inner content of a mikveh, in the words of the Rambam?

Bitul, giving oneself over: "to immerse in the waters of pure da'as." (§2)

- ★★ Why must a mikveh hold forty se'ah?

So that the whole body can go into it at once (Chagigah 11a). The whole person has to be inside.

(§2)

- ★★ What hint is hidden in the word "tevilah"?

Its letters also spell "habitul," the bitul: self-nullification. (§2)

- ★★★ How does bitul raise a person up?

When a person steps out of his own self and puts his "I" aside, that very bitul lifts him up and

makes him a keli (vessel) for kedushah. (§2)

- ★ What are parnassah worries called, and where is this explained at length?

"Mayim rabim," many waters. It is explained in Torah Ohr (the maamar "Mayim Rabim"). (§2)

9. ★★ What do parnassah worries have in common with the Mabul and the mikveh?

For a while they confuse a person, but through the breaking and the stepping out of himself they bring bitul and raise him to be a keli for kedushah. They wash away what is unwanted and bring nayacha d'rucha. (§2)

10. ★★★ Why can this whole process take just one moment?

Because it is not a punishment, chas v'shalom, but a washing and a purifying. If a person takes the inner content to heart, even in one moment, he has done what was needed, and he can have nayacha in gashmiyus and in ruchniyus together. (§3)

11. ★★ What would be the difference if the Mabul (or a hard time) were only a punishment?

A punishment has to be "served" in full. A cleansing is finished the moment its job is done: once the person has learned the lesson, there is no need for it to go on. (§3)

12. ★★★ A friend whose family is having a hard time with money says, "Hashem must be punishing us." Using the sicha, what could you gently tell him?

It is like a mikveh, not a punishment: it is cleaning and lifting. If we take in the inner point (bitul, knowing it is all from Hashem, trusting Him), it can pass in a moment, with nachas in gashmiyus and ruchniyus together. (§§1–3)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Inn That Burned

The Maggid of Mezritch and his talmidim once stayed at an inn. The innkeeper asked for advice: for many years the inn had given his family a good living, but now the landlord had raised the rent so much that he could hardly manage. Should he move to another inn, across the river? The Maggid sent him to his talmid, the young Rabbi Shneur Zalman, later the Alter Rebbe. "Move," said Rabbi Shneur Zalman, "and may you be blessed: a change of place brings a change of fortune."

When Rabbi Shneur Zalman woke up the next morning, the inn was empty: no guests, not a table, not a chair. "I was taught that when a tzaddik gives advice, you do it right away," the innkeeper explained. "Everything is already at the new inn, and your Rebbe and your friends too. Only you are left."

As the two of them crossed the river on the ferry, there was a loud crash. A bolt of lightning hit the old inn, and it went up in flames.

The Tzemach Tzedek would tell this story to his children, as a lesson in listening to our elders.

Source: Aharon Loschak, "The Hasty Departure" (chabad.org), as Reb Abba Person, a chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek, used to tell it

Think: The higher rent felt like a big problem. What did it turn out to be? How does that fit the sicha?

It was Hashem's way of getting him out before the fire: a rescue, not a punishment, just like the

Mabul and parnassah worries. And because he put his own thinking aside and acted at once (bitul),

the change came in one moment.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Hard times, like worries about money at home, are not a punishment. They are like a mikveh: they wash away what doesn't belong and help a person put his "I" aside, so he becomes a keli for kedushah. Take the lesson to heart, and it can pass in a moment.

For example: You didn't make the team, or your parents said no to the trip this year. Instead of "Why me?", ask "What is this cleaning out of me?" Maybe a little less showing off and a little more trust in Hashem. Say Modeh Ani with feeling tomorrow, daven for a friend who has it harder, and move on with a smile.

Get Into the Teivah!

בא אתה וכל ביתך אל התבה

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Noach, p. 5ff, sections 4–9. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Bereishis 5717 (1956).

The point: *The Mabul came from below ("tehom rabbah": lowly worries like parnassah) and from above ("arubos hashamayim": lofty-sounding busyness that pulls a person away from Torah and mitzvos). The cure for both: "Bo el hateivah," go into the words (teivos) of Torah and tefillah. After davening a person sees that only Elokus is truly real: "what is forbidden is forbidden, and what is permitted isn't needed." Bring your family, your students and every Jew in with you; that brings Hashem's help ("vayisgor Hashem ba'ado"). The goal is to go out again and make the whole world a dirah for Hashem.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ Into which two parts are the "mayim hazedonim" of the Mabul divided?

"Tehom rabbah," the great deep below, and "arubos hashamayim," the windows of heaven above. (§4)

2. ★★ Which troubles are like "tehom rabbah," and which are like "arubos hashamayim"?

Tehom rabbah: lowly material worries, like parnassah. Arubos hashamayim: lofty spiritual matters, like communal work, that keep a person from learning Torah and doing mitzvos in practice. (§4)

3. ★★★ How do we know that the "arubos hashamayim" excuse comes from the nefesh habahamis? Where does it end up?

Because it gets in the way of Torah and mitzvos as the Shulchan Aruch says, which is the opposite of kedushah (mitzvos are what connect a person to Hashem). In the end it slides down, step by step, from arubos hashamayim into tehom rabbah. (§4)

4. ★ What is the cure for both kinds of flood? How does the Baal Shem Tov explain "teivah"?

"Bo el hateivah." A teivah is also a word: go into the words of Torah and tefillah and be surrounded by them, and the rivers won't sweep you away. (§5)

5. ★★ Why did Rav Yeisa Sava daven for his food even when it was already on the table?

Because every creation, by itself, turns back to nothing every moment; it exists only because Hashem renews it all the time ("hamechadesh b'tuvo"). So even food on the table needs Hashem to renew it, and one asks Him for it. (§5)

6. ★★ Why do we say Modeh Ani and “Malbish arumim” even when our clothes are right there?

Before going out into the world, a Jew admits that his life and every detail come from Hashem, Who renews them each moment. (§5)

7. ★★★ Explain the chassidim’s saying “Ha’asur asur, v’hamutar ein tzorech bo.” How does davening change the “chazakah” (the starting assumption)?

Before davening, the world seems to be the real thing, so whatever is permitted (and even a safek) seems fine. After davening one knows that only Elokus is truly real and the world exists only to be Hashem’s dirah, so what doesn’t serve that isn’t needed. If the yetzer hara says he needs it, he must bring proof: “hamotzi meichaveiro alav hara’ayah.” (§5)

8. ★ Whom did Hashem tell Noach to bring into the teivah? What does that mean for us?

Himself, his sons, his wife and his sons’ wives: one’s family, one’s students (“your sons” = students) and, in the end, all of Yisroel. (§6)

9. ★★ Why can’t a Jew say “Ani es nafshi hitzalti,” I’ve saved myself, that’s enough?

All Yisroel are one body: the health of one limb affects the others. If he doesn’t take care of others, he is lacking himself. And after Matan Torah all Jews are responsible for each other (arvus). (§6)

10. ★★ What did the Rebbe Rashab say about chinuch, and why did he compare it to tefillin?

Just as every Jew must put on tefillin every day, every Jew must think at least half an hour a day about the chinuch of children and do everything he can, and more. Tefillin means giving over the heart and mind, so helping others has to be with heart and mind, not just to be yotzei. (§7)

11. ★★★ Why did Noach need “vayisgor Hashem ba’ado”? How does a person earn this help?

On one’s own strength, Torah and tefillah may not come out as they should (learning while forgetting the Giver of the Torah; davening that doesn’t affect the day). One needs help from Above, and earns it by giving oneself to others: “Meir einei shnei hem Hashem,” Hashem lights up the eyes of both. (§8)

12. ★★★ What is the real goal of “bo el hateivah”? And what must you do with things in the world that you happen to know about?

Not to stay in the teivah, but to go out and make the world a dirah for Hashem, like the Baal Shem

Tov, who returned to the world after davening. And anything you know would be lost without your

effort, you must “bring into your teivah” and raise up: Hashem let you know about it (hashgachah

pratis) for that reason. (§§8–9)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Tailor Who Had No Matzah

On Erev Pesach the Maggid of Mezritch would daven Maariv quickly, so he could begin bedikas chametz right away. One year, though, he davened for hours, almost like on Yom Kippur, and then shut himself in his room. Past midnight, his talmidim knocked: “Rebbe, what is happening?” “It is not good,” he answered. “Heaven is holding me back from the bedikah.”

Finally he came out: “There is a Jew near here who has no matzah for Pesach. I cannot search for chametz until we find him and take care of him!”

The chassidim searched the whole town and found no one. “Look farther, even outside the town,” said the Maggid. At last two chassidim reached a tiny village with a single Jew. He was a tailor, who every year gave money to the Maggid for the poor. This year he had been sick in bed for months, his savings were gone, and he had nothing for Yom Tov, not even matzah.

They brought him to the Maggid, who welcomed him warmly and gave him a large sum for himself and to share with others, as he always did. Only then, with great joy, did the Maggid search for chametz with his talmidim.

Source: Hillel Baron, “The Tailor Who Had No Matzah” (chabad.org)

Think: Why couldn’t the Maggid do his own mitzvah until the tailor was found? Which part of the sicha does this match?

All Yisroel are one body: when one Jew is missing something, everyone is. Like Noach, you can’t go

into the teivah alone; your own avodah is complete when you take care of the other Jew (§6, §8).

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Go into the teivah: surround yourself with Torah and davening. Then don't stay there alone; bring your family, your friends and every Jew in with you. And out in the world: what's forbidden is forbidden, and what's permitted, ask yourself if you really need it.

For example: Your chavrusa stopped coming to the morning seder. You could just learn alone and feel good about yourself. Instead, call him, offer to learn at his pace, or pick him up on the way. And when you have free time with your phone, try the chassidim's rule: "It's permitted? Fine. But do I need it?"

Now Start Teshuvah!

אשריכם ישראל, לפני מי אתם מטהרים ומי מטהר אתכם

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Noach, p. 11ff, sections 10–18. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Noach 5717 (1956).

The point: *Teshuvah has two sides: returning from sin (from below), and the soul returning to Hashem without end, with mesirus nefesh above reason (from Above). Mesirus nefesh means giving up one's own will: even a small push for Hashem counts ("mah li katla kulah, mah li katla palga"), and even the greatest person can't be satisfied with avodah that only makes sense to him. That is why Noah comes right after Tishrei, and why the Rebbe Rashab said the day after Yom Kippur, "Now one must begin teshuvah." And just as purity is complete when one leaves the mikveh, the point is to carry the level of Torah and davening out into the world.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ On which Mishnah did the Tzemach Tzedek write a note, and in which months?

"Amar Rabbi Akiva: ashreichem Yisroel, lifnei mi atem mitaharim umi metaher eschem" (the end of Yoma). He wrote it in Elul and Tishrei. (§10)

2. ★★ How is this Mishnah connected to Parshas Noach?

There is a maamar that opens this way from Shabbos Parshas Noach 5667, fifty years earlier. As Torah Ohr explains, the waters of the Mabul are like the purifying waters of a mikveh. (§10)

3. ★ What are the two kinds of teshuvah?

1) Simple teshuvah, for sins. 2) The inner teshuvah: "veharuach tashuv el haElokim asher nesanah," the soul returning to Hashem with a desire of the heart (re'usa d'liba) above reason. (§11)

4. ★★ How do the two kinds of teshuvah explain the double wording "before Whom you purify yourselves" and "Who purifies you"?

"Before Whom you purify yourselves" is teshuvah from below to above, for sins. "Who purifies you" is teshuvah from Above to below, the soul returning to Hashem. Both are hinted in "bo el hateivah": Torah comes from Above to below (stones made by Heaven), and tefillah goes from below to above (bricks made by man). (§§11–12)

5. ★★ What does mesirus nefesh mean here, and what does "mah li katla kulah, mah li katla palga" teach?

Mesirus nefesh means giving up one's own will. Any time a Jew pushes himself for Hashem, even with a small movement ("half a killing"), it is real mesirus nefesh. (§12)

6. ★★★ Why isn't avodah that makes sense enough, even for the greatest of the great, or for someone who learns lots of Chassidus?

"Bechol me'odecha," with your "more": as long as a person stays inside his own reason, he can't take in Elokus. Hashem dwells with the humble ("v'es daka ushfal ruach"). Even a quick learner must toil, and one who learns much Chassidus and thinks he has reached the top must not be satisfied: he too needs mesirus nefesh. (§§12–13)

7. ★★ Why do we read Parshas Noach right after Tishrei?

One might think that after Yom Kippur, when Yisroel is alone with the King, there is no more need for mesirus nefesh. So right away we read "bo el hateivah": the two lines of teshuvah. No "metziyus," however high, can hold Hashem Himself; one needs "bechol me'odecha." (§13)

8. ★ What did the Rebbe Rashab answer the Frierdiker Rebbe on the day after Yom Kippur, when he asked, "And now what?"

"Now one must begin to do teshuvah." (§14)

9. ★★★ Why start teshuvah right after Yom Kippur, when everything was forgiven? How does Bava ben Buta fit in?

True teshuvah, "veharuach tashuv el haElokim," has no end, because Elokus has no end: each level taken in reveals a higher one. Before Yom Kippur one was busy with lower things (sins); after it one can begin teshuvah in its inner sense. Bava ben Buta brought an asham talui every day except the day after Yom Kippur, because then there was no question of sin. (§14)

10. ★★ What happens when mesirus nefesh is missing, and what happens when it is there?

When it is missing, the whole connection to Elokus is flawed, not just one detail, and it can lead down to "not doing the will of Hashem." When it is there, even in simple ways, each by his own measure, one "does the will of Hashem," and even "strangers" don't stand in the way; they help. (§15)

11. ★★★ What was the goal of the Mabul and of the mikveh? How did the Baal Shem Tov live this?

Not the flood itself, when the world was nullified and all was inside the teivah, but going out of the teivah into the world on the same level. The Rambam says purity is complete when one comes out of the mikveh, and it should show. So too after Torah and davening. The Baal Shem Tov wasn't sure he would stay alive after davening, yet he came back to the world, because that is the main purpose. (§§16–17)

12. ★★ What did the Frierdiker Rebbe say about the week of Noach and the week of Lech Lecha? What brachah does the Rebbe give?

The week of Noach is a sad week; with Lech Lecha the joy begins, because Avraham Avinu is born (and “asher ar'eka” shows the greatness of the neshamos). May everything that is sad for now turn to joy, with open and visible good. (§18)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Five Flames

Reb Asher Sossonkin was one of the chassidim who kept Yiddishkeit alive in Communist Russia, and he spent many years in Soviet labor camps for it. In one camp he met Nachman Rozman, who as a young man had left Yiddishkeit, joined the Communist party and risen high in the Red Army, until he was arrested and sent to Siberia. With Reb Asher's help Nachman began to come back, though in the camp keeping kosher, not working on Shabbos or grabbing a few minutes to daven meant hunger, punishment and danger.

Before Chanukah, Reb Asher planned a tiny menorah from an empty can, with saved margarine for oil and threads from their coats for wicks. "Certainly not!" said Nachman. "It's Chanukah! We'll do it properly." With a few hidden rubles he got a real menorah from the metal shop.

For four nights they lit it in a doorway at the back of the barracks. On the fifth night, as five flames burned, an officer of the camp command walked in. "Quick, throw it in the snow!" the prisoners whispered. But the officer was already standing over the menorah. For a long minute he stared at it. Then he turned to Reb Asher: "P'yat?" (Five?) "P'yat," answered the chassid. The officer turned and left without a word.

Source: Yanki Tauber, "The Fifth Night" (chabad.org), from the Hebrew weekly Sichat Hashavua

Think: Nachman came back step by step, and Reb Asher would not throw away the flames. How is each of them "mesirus nefesh" according to the sicha?

Every small push for Hashem, like Nachman keeping a mitzvah in the camp, is "katla palga," real

mesirus nefesh; and even a great chassid like Reb Asher went beyond what made sense. With mesirus

nefesh, even the "stranger" (the officer) did not stop them (§§12, 15).

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Yom Kippur is over: now the real teshuvah begins, coming closer to Hashem without end. Don't be satisfied with what makes sense to you; push yourself a little past it, because every small push counts as mesirus nefesh. And let what you gained in Tishrei show all year, the way purity shows after the mikveh.

For example: In Tishrei you came to davening on time and really meant it. Now it's Cheshvan, and the alarm rings on a cold, dark morning. Getting up right away, when your head says "five more minutes," is your "katla palga." Pick one good hachlatah from Tishrei and keep it going this week.