

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Noach**  
**October 17, 2015**

**פרשת נח**  
**ד' בחשון תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 6:9-11:32

In this *parasha*, we hear about the story of Noach and the flood, about its aftermath when Noach planted a vineyard and got inebriated and his son saw “his nakedness,” and, finally, about the story of *Migdal Bavel*, the Tower of Babel and the birth of Avram.

I believe it is no coincidence that the Torah presents the story of the Tower of Babel, in which the people wanted to build a tower “with its top in heaven” (see chapter 11 for the full details) and the birth of Avram consecutively.

A midrash suggests that the people built the Tower of Babel because they were afraid of another flood destroying the earth and were building the tower as a defense against that. They believed that God was capricious and therefore would flood the earth whenever the Divine desire arose.

This midrash addresses a number of questions tangential to the Tower of Babel story. Noach clearly realized that there was one God: God spoke to Noach. According to the dates given in *Seder Olam Rabbah*, an early work outlining the chronology of events in the Torah, Noach was still alive when Avram was born. It is logical to conclude that he would have passed on his knowledge of the existence of one God to his descendants.

How is it, then, that we claim that Avram discovered the existence of one God—the true Hashem? I think the answer lies in the midrash quoted above. Avram discovered the existence not of one God, but of an ethical God. Avram was the first human to understand ethical monotheism. There is no indication that Noach understood this at all. There is every indication in the midrash that the people constructing the Tower of Babel believed that God was unethical in terms of behaving capriciously and without reason. Avram understood that not only is there one God, but that God is ultimately ethical in Divine intervention in the world.

That is the true beauty of the early Israelite religion which is the precursor to our Judaism today. It envisions a world that is run by Someone who will see to it that, ultimately, morality will prevail. This faith can help us to stand on firm ground when things go awry, to know that there is the One who will see to it that justice and morality prevail in the end.

Shabbat shalom!

For discussion:

- What is morality?
- Can you think of an act you have done that is moral?
- Can you think of something someone could do that is not moral?
- How is Hashem moral?