

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Noach
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פרשת נח
ד' במרחשון תשע"ז

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 plants a vineyard and gets inebriated, and his son “sees his nakedness”; and finally, about the story of the Tower of Babel and the birth of Avram.

We all know the overview of the flood story:

וַיֵּא וַתְּשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ, לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים; וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ, חָמָס. יב וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה: כִּי-הִשְׁחִית כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר אֶת-דַּרְכּוֹ, עַל-הָאָרֶץ. ו וְנֹחַ, בֶּן-שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה; וְהִמְבּוּל הָיָה, מִיַּם עַל-הָאָרֶץ.... ז: ט וְהַמַּיִם, גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד--עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וַיִּכְסּוּ, כָּל-הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים, אֲשֶׁר-תַּחַת, כָּל-הַשָּׁמַיִם. כ חָמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה מִלְּמַעְלָה, גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם; וַיִּכְסּוּ, הַהָרִים. כא וַיִּגְוַע כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר הַרְמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, בְּעוֹף וּבְבְהֵמָה וּבְחַיָּה, וּבְכָל-הַשָּׂרָץ, הַשָּׂרָץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ--וְכָל, הָאָדָם. כב כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת-רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאָפִיו, מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְבָּה--מָתוּ.... ח: יג וַיְהִי בְאַחַת וּשְׁש־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה, בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בְּאַחַד לַחֲדָשׁ, חָרְבוּ הַמַּיִם, מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ; וַיִּסַּר נֹחַ, אֶת-מִכְסֵה הַתֵּבָה, וַיֵּרָא, וְהִנֵּה חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה. יד וּבְחֲדָשׁ, הַשְּׁנִי, בְּשִׁבְעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם, לַחֲדָשׁ--יָבְשָׁה, הָאָרֶץ.

6:11 And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. **12** And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.... **7: 19** And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered. **20** Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. **21** And all flesh perished that moved upon the earth, both fowl, and cattle, and beast, and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and every human; **22** all in whose nostrils was the

breath of the spirit of life, whatsoever was in the dry land, died.... **8:13**
And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first month,
the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth;
and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold,
the face of the ground was dried. **14** And in the second month, on the
seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dry.

Why did Hashem opt to destroy the world specifically with water? We certainly know the havoc that water can wreak – think of the hurricane and flooding in North Carolina last month or of the tsunamis that we hear about on the news. As well as the practical power of water, there are also philosophical reasons for Hashem to use it.

The Babylonian Talmud, *Masechat* [Tractate] *Berachot* presents an interesting *halacha* (Jewish law): When we experience a flood, we should not make the standard blessing which we make over bad occurrences. One reason given for this is that, when the floodwaters recede, the land which was flooded will be especially rich in nutrients and produce particularly fine crops. (Just after the flood, Noah planted a vineyard and produced grapes good enough to turn into wine.) The message Hashem was giving to the remaining members of the human race was that the destruction of the existing world was not capricious, but was instead well thought-out, such that as soon as they emerged from the *teivah* (ark), rich, fertile soil awaited them.

Water in this context is also a great equalizer. What I mean by that is the following: The Torah tells us that “...the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered.” The residents of the *teivah* could not see the actual destruction, as they would have had the world been destroyed by fire or earthquake. All they saw was the smooth surface of an enormous ocean. They did not experience the trauma of viewing the destruction up close. Further, the subtle message given was that all are equal before Hashem; nothing stands higher than anything else; all can be wiped out equally.

Water is an interesting compound. It is one of the few substances in nature that is denser in its liquid form than in its solid form. (Trivia: The only other compounds with this property are gallium, bismuth, germanium, and silicon.) Were water not denser than ice, the earth could maintain no life across much of the planet. In the winter, ice floats atop bodies of water, leaving liquid insulated underneath. If this

were not the case, ice would form and sink, form and sink, and creatures who need water would have none during the cold months and would die of thirst.

It was with this most interesting compound, critical to the existence of all life on earth, and from which all life arose, that God erased the world as it had existed and created a renewed one.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What other reasons can you think of for Hashem destroying the world through water rather than through other means?
- Pour a glass of water and put ice into it. What do you notice about the water? About the ice? How would you explain the importance of water to life on earth?
- What do you think Noach saw when he looked out the window of the *teivah* during the flood? How do you think he felt when he saw this?