

Slippery Slope – Parshat Noach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Rabbi Frand, in discussing Parshat Noach, notes the progression of immorality from those transgressions against God performed behind closed doors to those transgressions against man performed openly. When society becomes decadent, all morality falls apart.

Rabbi Reiss, in Merosh Tzurim analyzes this progression. There are those who approach life in an egotistical manner, seeing themselves as the center. Then there are those who are altruistic, weighing their actions according to how they will impact the people and the world around them. The egoist cannot accept a system of justice and Godliness. As such, he closes the door to the possibility of doing *teshuvah* and repairing his actions. Such was the case with the generation of the flood. They were so involved in self-gratification that nothing else mattered.

To clarify the beginning of this mindset, the Torah records Lemech's taking two wives. Rav Schwadron analyzes his motivation. Lemech took the first wife, Adah, supposedly to fulfill the obligation of be fruitful and multiply. But he could not satisfy his lust with just one wife. So he took a second wife, Tzilah

and made her drink a birth control potion so that she could always remain his trophy wife. This was the lifestyle of self-indulgence that Lemech started and that his generation lived by.

Lemech's sons continued what he had started. The elder became a shepherd who moved from one tent to another as he grazed his sheep. The word "tent" is often used to denote a place of worship, in this case, idol worship. If there is no God above but merely man's own creations, one is in reality worshipping some aspect of himself and need not answer to a higher Authority. The second son became a musician and dedicated his music to the worship of gods. His melodies aroused the baser passions and emotions of mankind, luring them into further sin.

No one complained about the sins against God. Only when the passion for self-gratification began impacting others did the victims cry out for justice. As Rav Reiss points out, then Hashem could take action and render judgment, for Hashem notices the cries of the oppressed and champions their cause. But the whole generation had already become

so immersed in their own egos that they could not see the greater social picture and would not be able to do *teshuvah*. Their super egotism had already sealed their own fate.

The generation of the flood, explains Rabbi Roberts, misappropriated their gifts given to them by Hashem. Instead of living in harmony with each other and the will of Hashem, they misused these gifts to advance their personal agendas and pleasures, thereby stealing from each other and from Hashem Himself. Rabbi Frand notes that when society focuses its attention on the pursuit of pleasure it becomes addictive. It is never ending and never enough until all morality is lost in its pursuit.

The first boundary to protect us from sin, declares Rav Zilberg, is guarding one's eyes from negative sights that may lead to sin. Noach "found favor in the eyes of Hashem," because he kept his eyes focused on the "eye" of Hashem. He was therefore able to avoid the thievery and immorality of his generation. By guarding our eyes, we invoke Hashem's help in protecting us from sin. May we be successful in keeping our eyes focused on the pure and straight path.

Priorities in Lending Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

The Chofetz Chaim discusses priorities in giving loans. He brings a Mishna in Horiyot, from which we learn that the order of giving is first to a Kohen, then to a Levi and then to a Yisrael. But if the borrower is a *talmid chacham* he comes first. In his introduction to the Sefer Chofetz Chaim, the Chofetz Chaim writes that the *mitzvah* of "U'bo tidbak," (cleaving to Hashem) can be fulfilled by connecting to *talmidei chachamim* who are close to Hashem. If you do a *chesed* and that leads to more positive deeds, you get partial credit for all the good that results in the future. If you give a *talmid chacham* a loan and enable him to accomplish more in learning and teaching Torah, you get credit for his accomplishments.

One's Rebbe *muvhak* (primary teacher) or father get priority for a loan before a *talmid chacham*. Rav Akiva Eiger adds that other relatives also come before a *talmid chacham*. The Chacham Tzvi explains that one's

personal obligation to one's relative overrides the broader obligation of *Klal Yisrael* to the *talmid chacham*.

If the lender is not receiving any benefit from the loan, a poor person gets priority over a rich person. But if the rich person will use the loan as an investment in a business project and the lender who needs the money will receive profit, the Chofetz Chaim rules that that the rich person can get priority. However if you don't really need the extra profit, you should lend to the poor person first. You have to be honest with yourself. If you fool yourself and think you need the profit when you really don't, it can lead to poverty. Rashi says that if a person ignores the responsibility of *tzedaka*, in the end he will end up needing the help of others.

If both a poor person and a poor relative ask you for a loan, the relative comes first. If the poor person comes and you happen to know that your relative is also on his way, you are

allowed to hold off and wait for your relative. But if you are in doubt whether he will come, you can't say, "I won't lend to this person because perhaps my relative will come."

If you donate money to a general collection fund, the Rabbanim and Gabbaim decide based on need who gets priority. The rules of personal priorities don't apply. The rule of priority applies not only to money and items but also to benefiting others. Chazal rule that selling to a Jew has priority over selling to a non-Jew. This also applies to renting which is a form of acquisition. The Chofetz Chaim quotes from Pirkei Avot, "V'yhiyu *aniyim bnei beitecha*. Poor people should be members of your household." The Rambam notes that if you need work done around the house you should hire a poor person and give him business. If you want to donate your time and abilities, a *talmid chacham* gets priority. Offer your services to your local Rabbi or Jewish school.



Leader of a Generation: Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzenski

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Rav Chaim Ozer stood at the helm of European Jewry. Rav Berel Wein once said, "Rav Chaim Ozer carried European Jewry on his back." Picture a chess grandmaster skirting up and down the table playing against sixteen opponents simultaneously. That was Rav Chaim Ozer. His home teemed with people in need. There was the widow asking how she would marry off her daughter. There was the head of a yeshiva asking about curriculum. There was the representative from the Joint Distribution Committee asking how to distribute funds. Rav Chaim Ozer heard them all out while simultaneously writing Torah novella and fielding questions coming in from overseas.

Rav Chaim Ozer was able accomplish so much because he was so incredibly organized. He once gave a groom the following advice, "Be organized. Even someone not endowed with superior mental abilities can be successful in life if he is well organized." Rav Chaim Ozer once said, "When I was young I thought it was the greatest accomplishment to write an original Torah thought. When I got older I realized it was a greater accomplishment to gladden the heart of a widow."

With the outbreak of the second world war, Rav Chaim Ozer instructed his student Rav Eliezer Silver to establish the Vaad Hatzalah, an organization that would offer relief to yeshiva students and teachers. Rav Silver determined that he would be more successful

in his efforts if he had someone who could describe in writing the work of the Vaad Hatzalah. He chose Dr. Samuel Shmidt, a graduate of MIT and a native of Kovno. Although he was an irreligious Zionist and Socialist, he was a devotee of Rabbi Silver, and he agreed to travel to see firsthand the work of the Vaad Hatzalah.

Rav Chaim Ozer was in the throes of his final illness when Dr. Shmidt came to see him. Rav Chaim Ozer placed his hand on Dr. Shmidt's shoulder in a gesture of warmth and respect, and greeted him as Reb Shmuel. Dr. Shmidt responded, "Rabbi if you only knew who I was you wouldn't call me Reb Shmuel." Rav Chaim Ozer countered, "If you can leave your family and the security of America to travel to worn torn Europe you are indeed Rav Shmuel." At that moment a metamorphosis occurred. Dr. Shmidt became Reb Shmuel, a fully observant Jew. Before he returned to America, he received a message that Rav Chaim Ozer wanted to see him. When he arrived, Rav Chaim Ozer gave him a letter to take back to the US. It wasn't until he was on the boat that he saw that it was addressed to his wife. The leader of European Jewry had taken the time to thank her for allowing her husband to leave the tranquility of America to travel to war torn Europe and execute his mission on behalf of his brethren.

As his illness progressed, a delegation came to Rav Chaim Ozer to ask what they could do for him. His major request was to buy a new

pair of shoes for his housekeeper as winter was coming. His minor request was to acquire medicine for himself. Later on as the war progressed, Rav could be better used to buy food for starving Jews.

In 1940, Russia annexed Lithuania. Everyone was terrified. All the work Rav Chaim Ozer had done over the years was about to crumble. Yet he kept his morale strong and raised the spirits of those around him. There were printing shops in Vilna that were printing false visas. They asked Rav Chaim Ozer if they should print one for him. He said, "All I ask is for a visa to this lowly world." He meant to say, "May I stay alive long enough to help all those people who depend on me."

In his final days, Rav Chaim Ozer was asked a difficult question. Several community leaders had succeeded in acquiring a limited number of exit visas. Should they give them to the younger students or to the elder *roshei yeshiva*. Rav Chaim Ozer pondered this question of life and death. He then ruled that the visas should be given to the *roshei yeshiva* since they were best suited to replant the Torah of Lithuania in America and Israel. He also believed that they would work tirelessly on behalf of those who had been left behind in Europe. His foresight was demonstrated by the superhuman efforts expended by such *gedolim* as Rav Avraham Kalmonowitz, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Reuven Grozowski, and Rav Bloch who successfully replanted Torah in America.