
א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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Noach

Candle Lighting: 5:25

The Importance of Diverse Opinions

By Ephraim Fischer

Towards the end of this week's פרשת נח, פרשת תורה discusses the story of מגדל בבל. This is a story that we are all familiar with: A group of people get together, and they build a very tall tower in order to fight HaShem. HaShem then mixes up their languages so that they can't finish building this tower, and they were scattered throughout the world. However, upon closer inspection of the Psukim, it doesn't look like they did anything wrong! All it says is that they built a tall tower to make a name for themselves! What could be wrong with that?

One approach is the approach of ספורנו. ספורנו says that at the top of this big tower, there was an idol. The people building the tower wanted everyone to follow their religion, so they built this very tall tower so that everyone would be under one religion: Their own. This way, there would be one king that would have power over the entire world, which would be the king of this city. While this approach settles the problem at hand, I'd like to discuss a different one.

The נצי"ב, in his commentary of העמק דבר, states that what they wanted didn't have anything to do with religion: It had to do with control. Because everyone has different opinions, the kings feared that people would leave their city. Therefore, they thought that by building a large tower, people would stay in their city forever. While people were in their city, they could enforce their opinion on everybody, and make everyone have the same opinions on every issue. Their fear wasn't necessarily that people would leave their city, rather that people would abandon their philosophy. Furthermore, anybody that would have a different opinion than the one of the city would be executed. Therefore, the problem may have not been that they were trying to rebel against HaShem, rather that they were trying to go against our very nature as humans by not allowing people to think.

This explains why HaShem wanted to mix up their languages. In the next פסוק, HaShem says, "הָיוּ עַם אֶחָד וְשָׁפָה" (Gen 11:1), that if this is the product of having one people speaking one language, then nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach. One language means one opinion. If HaShem hadn't mixed up their languages, it would have completely taken away their free will by putting their opinions in the hands of one ruler. HaShem created humans with the intent of us having free will, and by doing this, our existence as humans is being undermined.

We can now see why this story was included in פרשת נח. Noach was a person who was different from everyone else in his generation. While everyone else was out, engaging in terrible acts that caused HaShem to regret creating humans, Noach decided to be different. If everyone of that generation was the same, there would be nobody left to repopulate the earth. Here too, if everyone would have had the same opinion, we would be unable to evolve and develop as a civilization. Both of these stories show the importance of difference of opinion.

We have a concept in Judaism of "שבעים פנים לתורה", that there are seventy different ways to view the תורה. When we study the תורה, we have many different Biblical commentaries, many different books of הלכה, and even dissenting opinions written in the גמרא. We study all of these because as Jews, we believe that there can be many different right opinions on one issue. Even if one commentary solves a problem, we always look for more answers. All of these different opinions help us understand the תורה on a much deeper level than if we only had a single answer. If you have an opinion that disagrees with a different commentator, you shouldn't be afraid to hide it just because it's a dissenting opinion. It can help us understand the תורה on a deeper level than we could before. After all, uniformity of opinion takes away the one thing that makes us human: free will.

Just How Big Was Noach's Teiva?

By Binyamin Orkaby

In this week's parsha, parshat Noach, Hashem tells Noach that a flood is coming and that he should build a boat. Over the next 120 years Noach would build a boat as told by Hashem. "תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אָרְךָ הֵיחָבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה" Hashem tells Noach to build the Boat three hundred amot long, 50 amot wide and 30 amot high. An amah is equivalent to roughly 1.5 feet meaning that the teivah's dimensions in feet were: 450ft long, 75ft wide and 45ft tall. Think of it as about three football fields stacked one on top of the other and then some. However, even though the teivah seems so massive, it begs the question of just how Noach was able to fit all the species of animals in the world onto this boat. Not just one of each animal either, but two of each non-kosher animal, and 14 (7 male + 7 female) for the kosher animals. So how is it that Noach was able to fit so many animals onto his teivah?

To find the answer let us look at the meforshim on the pasuk. The Meam Loez brings down that some say that the amot at the time was six times larger than the ones we have now. While this makes the Teivah even larger, it still does not seem conceivable that all the different species of the world would be able to fit into the teivah. The Meam Loez and Rabbeinu Bachya both say that it was a miracle that all the animals could fit into the teivah. This raises another question as to why the teivah would need to be built if Hashem could just make a miracle with a smaller teivah, or just make the animals be able to fly or walk on water? The Meam Loez and the Rabbeinu Bachya answer that while yes Hashem could make all these miracles happen, Hashem prefers to let people do as much as they can and only when they can't do any more does Hashem do the rest.

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