

Parashat Bereishit 5777, 2016:

And the Almighty Was Pained to His Very Core

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the refuah shlaimah of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka and Leah bat Shifra, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The concluding verses of our *parasha* portend the impending annihilation of the Generation of the Flood:

G-d saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing. Every impulse of his innermost thought was evil, all day long. G-d regretted (*vayinachem*) that He had made man on earth, and He was pained (*vayitatzav*) to His very core. G-d said, "I will obliterate humanity that I have created from the face of the earth – man, livestock, land animals, and birds of the sky, I regret (*nichamti*) that I created them." (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:5-7, translator, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*, *The Living Torah*)

This poignant passage is quite remarkable. Herein we are told that Hashem regretted having created humanity to the extent that He was "pained to His very core." Yet, why was this so? Why did Hashem suffer to the innermost depths of His being? Rashi (1040-1105) explains that He "mourned over the destruction of His handiwork," i.e. the imminent obliteration of "man, livestock, land animals, and birds of the sky." In a certain sense, however, Hashem's reaction is startling. After all, in His omniscience, He knew from the very moment of Creation that man would sin in an egregious fashion and be deserving of extinction. If so, why did G-d create man when He could have spared Himself the abject sorrow of destroying him? Rashi addresses this conundrum in one of his glosses on our verse:

A gentile asked Rabbi Joshua ben Korchah, "Do you not admit that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresees the future?" He [Rabbi Joshua] replied to him, "Yes." He retorted, "But it is written: and

‘He became grieved in His heart!’” He [Rabbi Joshua] replied, “Was a son ever born to you?” “Yes,” he [the gentile] replied. “And what did you do?” he [Rabbi Joshua] asked. He replied, “I rejoiced and made everyone rejoice.” “But did you not know that he was destined to die?” he asked. He [the gentile] replied, “At the time of joy, joy; at the time of mourning, mourning.” He [Rabbi Joshua] said to him, “So is it with the work of the Holy One, blessed be He; even though it was revealed before Him that they would ultimately sin, and He would destroy them, He did not refrain from creating them, for the sake of the righteous people who were destined to arise from them.” (Translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Thus, even though Hashem was, by definition, fully cognizant that mankind “would ultimately sin, and He would destroy them,” He nonetheless created man “for the sake of the righteous people who were destined to arise from them.” As such, according to Rashi, Hashem’s personal misery resulting from the deaths of the Generation of the Flood was the necessary price to be paid in order to create a world wherein just and virtuous people would eventually flourish.

The Radak (Rav David Kimchi, 1160-1235) offers a very different approach to the terms “*vayinachem*” and “*vayitatzav*.” He begins by explaining that “*vayinachem*” cannot be taken at face value: “This is an instance wherein the Torah employs terminology that is easily understood by the common man; since, in truth, Hashem is not a person and does not regret anything. Moreover, Hashem, may He be blessed and exalted, is ever [perfect and] unchanging” The Radak follows a similar approach in his analysis of “*vayitatzav*”:

This, too, is to be understood as a metaphor, since, in truth, Hashem neither engages in joy nor sorrow. In addition, He does not change from one behavior to another... and all of this is nothing other than an allegorical presentation. In other words, just as a person is joyous regarding a matter that is proper and fitting in his eyes, and is sad in regards to something negative in his perception, so, too, is this narrative related about the All-Powerful One may He be blessed – and it is to be understood as discussing Hashem in human terms (*al derech ha’avarah*). In addition, joy and sadness reside in the heart of a person – therefore, the Torah metaphorically employs the expression, “to His very core (“*el libo*”) in reference to the All-Powerful One may He be Blessed. (Translations and annotations my own)

In sum, the Radak, views the expressions “*vayinachem*” and “*vayitatzav*” as descriptive phrases that allude to the depths of depravity to which the Generation of the Flood had fallen; they are not, however, to be taken as actual portrayals of Hashem’s behavior.

Whether we follow the explication of Rashi or the Radak, it is clear that humankind had reached the nadir of existence in the period before the Flood. As *Chazal* (our Sages of Blessed Memory) teach us in numerous sources, their actions were so morally reprehensible that they managed to pervert nearly all life forms, with the exception of the fish of the sea, which were beyond their control. In short, without Noach, regarding whom the Torah states, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem,” (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:8) mankind and the rest of Creation would have ceased to exist.

I believe that we have much to learn from Noach, for it was he, and he alone, who found favor in Hashem’s eyes. His values and behaviors brought *nachat ruach* (joy to the core) to Hashem, in contrast to those of the rest of mankind who pained our Creator “to His very core.” May we, therefore, emulate Noah by bringing the best of our potential to our lives, as we strive to fulfill the *mitzvot* of Hashem’s holy Torah. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.