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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA
מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

<u>פרשת נח</u>

בִּשְׁנַת שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי נֹחַ וכו', בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל מַעְיְנוֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וַאֲרֻבֹּת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחוּ.
(בראשית ז, יא)
In the six hundredth year of Noach's life …on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth; and the windows of the heavens were opened. (*Bereishis* 7:11)

This week's *Sidrah* describes the immorality and corruption that filled the world, leading to Hashem's decree to destroy it. The righteous Noach and his family were saved and given the important mission of preserving humanity and all animal species. They accomplished this by building the *teivah* and caring for the needs of its inhabitants during the Mabul.

When describing the subterranean fountains that erupted, the *possuk* states, נִבְקְעוּ כָּל מַעְיְנוֹת תְּהוֹם **רַבָּה**, *all the fountains of the **great** deep burst forth*, using the term רַבָּה, meaning "great." Rashi cites the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 108a), which explains that Hashem punished the people *middah knegged middah*, measure for measure. They sinned by כִּי **רַבָּה** רָעַת הָאָדָם, *the wickedness of man was **great** (Bereishis 6:5)*, and as a result, they were stricken by תְּהוֹם **רַבָּה**, *the **great** deep.*

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* emphasises that the focus on the word רַבָּה, *great*, indicates that the root cause of the sins committed by the Dor HaMabul is closely linked to the concept of רַבָּה, *great*. (While the specific sins included idolatry, immorality and corruption, their root cause appears to stem from this idea of רַבָּה.)

He cites an insightful explanation from the Sefer Kehilas Yitzchok, who explains their sin and the parallel to the world being punished with the תְּהוֹם רַבָּה. Man was created last, after everything else was fashioned and made ready. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 38a) explains that this sequence indicates that the world's immense goodness is arranged for the benefit and enjoyment of humanity. However, there is one important caveat: boundaries and limitations must exist. Without them, the pursuit and indulgence in desires without restraint can corrupt and devastate the fabric and purpose of Creation.

The generation of the Mabul did not exercise any restraint; they indulged in every desire they craved. As the *possuk* (6:2) states, וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה, וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ, *The sons of the judges saw that the daughters of man were good, and they took themselves wives from whomever they chose*. They acted solely on their desires, without considering any consequences. Therefore, their sins are described as **רַבָּה** as they pursued their desires to the **great**est extent without limits.

Consequently, they were punished with רַבָּה. Hashem showed that an excessive amount of anything, even beneficial things, can be harmful. Even positive elements should be regulated to prevent destruction. An example of this is water; it is fundamentally helpful in providing drinking supplies for people and enabling plants and crops to grow. However, when left uncontrolled, like when the fountains of the great **deep** burst forth, it can lead to devastation.

This insight sheds light on an intriguing Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 33:9). When the floodwaters

began to recede, Noach sent out a dove to determine if it was safe to leave the *teivah*. The *possuk* (8:11) states, וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב וְהִנֵּה עֲלֵה זַיִת טָרָף בְּפִיהָ, *The dove came back to him in the evening – and behold! An olive leaf it had plucked with its mouth*. The Midrash explains that the gates of Gan Eden were opened for the dove, and from there, it retrieved the olive leaf.

This miraculous event begs the question: why was it necessary for Gan Eden to open to provide this olive leaf? The Kehilas Yitzchok explains that Hashem was sending a message to the new world about how to appropriately engage with physicality. Human desires should not be left unchecked, as they were before the flood; rather, they should be regulated. This world is only passing, as a preparation for Gan Eden. Thus, a humble olive leaf originating from Gan Eden alludes to our ultimate goal of Olam Habah. This whiff of Gan Eden served to downplay the pursuit of materialistic desires that inhibit spiritual growth and preparation for the next world.

This notion is further supported by the Gemara (*Eruvin* 18b) cited by Rashi, which elaborates that the dove was making a statement with the olive leaf. It expressed: "Let my food be as bitter as an olive and provided by Hashem, rather than as sweet as honey but supplied by human hands."

How is one expected to withstand the burning temptations that the world tries to entice us with? The Rosh Yeshiva addresses this challenge by explaining that the spiritual enjoyment and satisfaction derived from learning Torah holds the key to curbing worldly cravings. The spiritual delight empowers a person to overcome the *yetser horah*, which tries to lure one into sin. Although a person may not initially feel enjoyment and sweetness when learning Torah, this feeling will develop when one sincerely applies himself (*See Lev Eliyahu vol. 1, pg. 36*).

This lesson is also suggested by the olive leaf from Gan Eden. One must find joy and satisfaction in spirituality to withstand the temptations of the *yetser horah*. After the devastating destruction caused by the Mabul, it was essential to teach this important lesson. Furthermore, the olive leaf signifies that true delight can be found even within bitter circumstances. Even without material pleasures, one can experience a truly good life.

We must learn from the lesson of the Mabul to control our materialistic desires and yearnings. Although Hashem created the world for our use and enjoyment, we must utilise it in moderation. The generation of the Mabul failed to recognise this and was punished with overwhelming goodness – the devastating waters of the flood. We should also understand that true happiness and satisfaction do not depend on worldly pleasures. Instead, they come from spiritual growth, which helps us curb our materialistic desires and ultimately leads to a fulfilling life!

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.