



THE TRUE PURPOSE OF THE TEIVAH

THE TEIVAH WAS NOT FOR PROTECTION

Today, I want to share with you something that I heard from my *Rebbi* (HaRav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, zt"l) many years ago. It's what you would refer to as a Brisker *chiddush*. One of the uniquenesses of the Briskers, is that they took nothing for granted. All assumed understandings were always re-analyzed and re-studied in order to find the *emes*. I remember hearing this *chiddush* from my *Rebbi* and thinking, "Wow! That's an interesting *devar Torah*!" And then I realized it wasn't a *devar Torah*. They generally don't say *divrei Torah*. What they try to find is the *emese pshat* in the *pesukim*. Let me share with you this wonderful *chiddush*.

In this *parshah*, we encounter the *mabul* and the building of the *teivah*. Now, if you would ask the average person: what was the purpose of the *teivah*? What would they probably say? To save Noach and his family, and to save the creatures that Hashem decided to save. Would you agree to that? That's what most of the world would say.

Along came my *Rebbi* and said that there can be nothing further from the truth! The reason for the *teivah* was not to protect Noach and his family, or to protect the animals and preserve a continued existence. Now, you may say, "Where did he get that from?" So the answer is, he got it from the *pesukim*, right in the *chumash*. That's what Briskers usually did. They had a way of looking at things or re-looking at things and saying, "Hey, what does it say over here?"

HOW TO ASK A QUESTION FROM PESUKIM

If you take a look at the *pesukim*, it says as follows: Hashem comes to Noach and says, קץ כל בשר בא לפני, *the end of all flesh has come before Me*, כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם את הארץ, *for the earth is filled with lawlessness, and behold, they are destroying it* (Bereishis 6:13). The people have done bad things and I will destroy them from the earth, עשה לך תיבת עצי גופר - make for yourself a *teivah* (verse 14). And the *pesukim* then go on to explain how the *teivah* should be made. Only afterward the *pasuk* (17) says, ואני הנני מביא את המבול מים על הארץ לשחת כל בשר, *I'm going to bring a a mabul, a flood to destroy all flesh*.

So my *Rebbi* asked, the *pesukim* seem to be out of order. First, Hashem should have told Noach, "I am going to bring a *mabul* on the *aretz*," and then afterwards, He should have commanded him to go build a *teivah* to protect himself from the *mei hamabul*. But instead Hashem said, "I'm going to destroy the world. Build a *teivah*." Then afterwards He tells Noach, "I'm going to bring a *mabul al ha'aretz*." If the whole purpose of the *teivah* was to save Noach from the *mei hamabul*, shouldn't Hashem have first told him, "I'm going to bring the *mabul al ha'aretz*" and then command him to make a *teivah*!?

This is what you call a Brisker question. It's a simple, to-the-point question. Now, many people might say, "Ah, what difference does it make if it says it like this or it says it like that?" Nah, nah, nah. The Briskers understood that if the Torah says something and Hashem says something, it's very *mesudar*. It's very 'in order.'

So the *Rebbi* introduced us to something that he had heard from his great father, the Brisker Rav. There's a *gemara* in *Zevachim* (116a) that states that Noach took all the animals from the world and he made them pass in front of the *teivah*. Any animals שהתיבה קולטתן - that the *teivah* absorbed - it was known that these animals were pure, and those animals that the *teivah* would not absorb, it was known that they were *teme'im*.¹

So the Brisker Rav picked up on nuances, and one of the nuances he picked up on, is why did the *gemara* use the words שהתיבה קולטתן? Why does it say such a funny language that the *teivah* **absorbed**? It should have said, that anyone that the *teivah* allowed in was *tahor*, or anyone that the *teivah* "brought in." What is the term of קולטתן? This is the question of the Brisker Rav. And we have to learn from this, because he had very good 'glasses,' and we have to learn from his way of seeing things. We have to try to apply this method when we learn.

¹ מנא הוּו ידעי כדרב חסדא דאמר רב חסדא העבירן לפני התיבה כל שהתיבה קולטתן בידוע שהוא טהור אין התיבה קולטתן בידוע שהן טמאין.

A GEZEIRAH OF DESTRUCTION

He said the following answer: The world had a decree on it of *kliyah*, of total destruction. The world was going to be completely destroyed. And Hashem said, “I’m going to create a place within this destroyed world, that’s going to be a *makom* of *hatzalah*. It’s going to be like an *ir miklat* that absorbs *rotzchim* and saves them.” So the *din* of *hatzalah* of the *teivah* was that it was *kolet*, it absorbed and saved anyone who was absorbed into it. That was his ticket to live in this new atmosphere, in this new biosphere, in this new environment.

You have to know that the *teivah* wasn’t a *heicha timtza* (a means) alone to create a place where there was no *mabul*. No. The whole aspect of the *teivah* was that the *gezar din* of *kliyah*, of destruction, was not in effect in this place. Hashem told Noach, “I’m going to destroy the world, and I’m going to create another world, a new world in that *teivah*.” That means that the *teivah* was like something that came down from *shamayim*, from an outer world existence, and came to this world. It was a new world, an *olam chadash*. That’s what the *teivah* was.

Outside, the world as we know it, did not exist. You know what had to transpire during the *mabul* when Hashem destroyed the world? During the destruction of the world, there was no day and there was no night. There was no spring and there was no summer. There was no fall and no winter. There were no seasons. Destruction of the world means there was nothing. The sun didn’t rise. The moon didn’t rise. Everything was gone.

That’s why when Noach came out of the *teivah*, Hashem made a *bris* with him. You know what the *bris* said? “I’ll never again stop the seasons. I’ll never again stop the day and the night.” My Rebbi asked: “Why would you have to say that? Who stopped the seasons?” He answered, because the world had a *gezeirah* of destruction. It was not *shayach* to exist in the world because there was no world left. Everything was completely destroyed. And the *teivah* became this new world that lived and existed without any *shaychus*, without any bond to the outside.

THE TEIVAH WAS A WORLD IN ITSELF

That’s why the gemora (ibid) uses the terminology התיבה קולטת - the *teivah* was *kolet* (absorbed) just like an *ir miklat*. *Bederech hateva* it was not *shayach* to exist outside. Even the *teivah* itself wasn’t able to contain all of the species of animals and birds and vermin. Yet, it existed. How? In this new world, it existed. The rules of the outer world did not apply to this world. This is what you call a *briah chadashah*.

Now, when Hashem said האדמה מעל פני האדמה אשר בראתי מעל פני האדמה, *I am going to wipe out Man that I have created from the face of the Earth*, *from man to animal... for I have regretted that I created them* (Bereishis 6:7). At that time, Hashem terminated the ‘license’ for the world to exist. Hashem regretted having created the world. So the whole *sheshes yemei bereishis*, everything that was created, ceased to exist, and Hashem created a new order, a new world within, that wasn’t guided by seasons. It wasn’t guided by night and day. It had its own rules of engagement. The *lashon of Chazal* (Bereishis Rabbah 26:1) is ששתלו הקב"ה לנח בתיבה, Hashem “planted” Noach in the *teivah*. Why doesn’t it say He “brought” him into the *teivah*? It says שתלו. שתלו means Hashem created a new root, a new source of existence and it had no *shaychus* to the regular *briah*.²

Now we can understand why Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Noach that “the world is coming to an end and, therefore, he must build a *teivah*.” Hashem was telling him, “You have to build a new world. You have to create a new place because the world, *I’m destroying the world*.” Hashem was telling him, “That’s why you built a *teivah*, to be saved from the decree of destruction of the world.” It had nothing to do with the *mabul*. It had to do with the *gezeirah* of destroying the world. You’re going to enter the doors of the *teivah* and you’re going to be saved *bederech nes*. Then Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “Oh, **by the way**, let me tell you how I’m going to carry out the *gezeirah*, the decree of destroying the world. You know how I’m going to do that? I’m going to bring a *mabul*.” But the *hatzalah* of the *teivah* is not directly related to the *mabul*. Whichever way Hashem would have decided to destroy the world, it would have happened. Let’s say Hashem would have just nuked everybody. You also would have needed a *teivah*. The *gezeirah* was, “I’m nuking the world. I’m stopping the world from existing as you know it.” A person can’t live within a nonexistent world. That’s why you need this *teivah*.

My Rebbi explained that based on this, we can understand why the Torah writes at length about how you make the *teivah*, what the measurements are, how wide it is, how long it is, building a window, how it comes to the top, the doorway. *Pashtus* the reason why you needed to put pitch on the outside and on the inside was because of the strength of the water, and the reason why you had to have the slanted roof was that the water should run off on both sides. You needed to have a door on the side so rain shouldn’t fall in. The question is: why do you have to give me all these details? If the reason for the building of the *teivah* is to save you from the rain, it’s *pushut*. If it’s going to rain, you don’t open the door. The roof, it’s a *pushute zach*. If you have hot water outside, you put pitch on both sides to prevent the water from leaking in.

² ויהי נח בן חמש מאות שנה (בראשית ה, לב), כתיב (תהלים א, א): אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים. אשרי האיש, זה נח. אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד, רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה, רבי יהודה אומר בשלשה דורות, בדור אנוש ובדור המבול ובדור הפלגה. רבי נחמיה אומר בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה, אבל בדור אנוש היה קטן. על דעתיה דרבי יהודה דאמר אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים, זה דור אנוש. ובדרך חטאים לא עמד, זה דור המבול. ובמושב לצים לא ישב, זה דור הפלגה. (תהלים א, ב): כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו, אלו שבע מצוות שנצטוו. (תהלים א, ב): ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה, שהגה דבר מתוך דבר, אמר מה טעם רבה הקדוש ברוך הוא בטהורים יותר מטמאים, לא שהוא רוצה להקריב מהם קרבן, מיד (בראשית ח, כ): ויקח מכל בהמה הטהרה וגו', (תהלים א, ג): והיה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים, ששתלו הקדוש ברוך הוא בתבה. (תהלים א, ג): אשר פריו יתן בעתו, זה שם, (תהלים א, ג): ועלחו לא יבל, זה חס. (תהלים א, ג): וכל אשר יעשה יצלח, זה יפת.

But the *emes* is, according to this, my Rebbi says, it's very understandable. Because the *teivah* wasn't simply a *heicha timtza*, a means to protect from the *mabul*. *Adaraba, bederech hateva*, there was no way to exist in the world once Hashem decided to destroy the world, and all of these *middos*, all these measurements and the whole form of the *teivah* was because this was a miraculous new existence. Noah was building a new world, so Hashem told him these are the measurements and these are the limitations of how the *tzurah* of the new world has to look.

Let's say Noah would have built something better. If he would have gotten some super aluminum or super titanium and made a titanium box, he wouldn't have been spared. He was only spared because Hashem told him this is how you build this world, and he followed those directions precisely. He wasn't building the world to save himself from the water. He was building a new world to save himself from the world outside - because it was going to cease to exist.

THE POWER OF TZEDAKAH V'CHESSED

That's what my Rebbi said. But we'd like to add that according to this we can understand a famous *medrash*.³ The *medrash* says that Avraham Avinu met up with the son of Noah, Shem, after the whole story of the *teivah*, and he asked him, "How did you get out of the *teivah*? How did you manage to get out of the *teivah*?" So he told him, "You want to know how we got out? We got out because of the *tzedakah* that we did." Avraham asked him, "What *tzedakah* did you do? Were there any poor people in the *teivah*? It was only you and your family. Who were you doing *tzedakah* with?" He said, "We were doing *tzedakah* with the *beheimah*, the *chayah*, and the *of*." They couldn't sleep. They would constantly feed them. Avraham Avinu said, "Pshhhh. They did *tzedakah* for *beimos* and *chayos*, and if not, they wouldn't have gotten out of the *teivah*. But they did the *tzedakah* and they got out. If I'm going to do *tzedakah* with humans, if I'm going to dedicate my life to taking care and helping those who are created in the image of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *al achas kamah v'kamah*." It says, at that time, Avraham Avinu planted an *eishel*. He made an inn for *achilah, shetiyah* and *linah*.

It's interesting that Avraham Avinu asked him a funny question. You know what he said to him? "How did you get out of the *teivah*?" Why didn't he ask him how did you live in the *teivah*? What kind of question was, "How did you *get out* of the *teivah*?"

The fact that they were *zocheh* to go into the *teivah* was because the pasuk says: *נח מצא חן בעיני ה'*, *Noach found favor b'einei Hashem* (Bereishis 6:8). What Avraham Avinu could not understand was, "How did you get out?" The world was already destroyed. There was no existing universe anymore, as they knew it before they entered the *teivah*. He said, "You know what kind of *zechus* you had? You were *zocheh* to come out of this *teivah*! You weren't forced to live in this *teivah* for the rest of your life. You were allowed to come out of the *teivah* and rebuild a completely new world. That's what happened. You were *zocheh* to rebuild the world. The world had ceased to exist. It wasn't a *hemshech* of the old world. It was a brand new world. So what was it that gave you that *koach* to build a world?" So when he heard that, he said, "Oh. The answer is *tzedakah*."

You have to know that if you want to be *zocheh* to contribute to creating the world, the way to do it is through *tzedakah v'chesed* - *עולם חסד יבנה* (Tehillim 89:3).⁴ That was the secret Avraham Avinu heard from Shem.

USE JEALOUSY FOR YIRAS HASHEM, TO BUILD

If you look in *Tehillim* (37:1) it says, *leDovid*, Dovid Hamelech said, אל תתחר במרעים, don't compete with *reshaim*. Don't be jealous of those who do wrong and seem to beat the system. אל יקנא לבך בחטאים, my son in your heart, don't be jealous of sinners. So the *medrash* (ibid) says ובמה יקנא לבך, it says don't be jealous of this, but what should your heart be jealous of? כל היום, in *yiras Hashem*. ביראת ה' Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, אמר הקב"ה, be jealous of *קנא לי*, if not for jealousy and competitiveness, אין העולם עומד, the world would not stand. A person wouldn't plant. He wouldn't build. He wouldn't fight to build a family. He wouldn't build houses. אלמלא, if not for the fact that Avraham was *m'kanei*, he would have never been *קונה שמים וארץ*. *Chazal* ask, when was Avraham *m'kanei*? (when he was jealous). The answer - when he met Shem ben Noah. That's when he became jealous. Avraham said to himself: "He (Noach) was *zocheh* to build a world by helping animals, so if I dedicate my life to building people, you know what that's going to do for me? That's going to enable me to save the world from trouble and affliction."

When a person wants to get married, you have to know the reason to get married is to build. You have to tell Hashem, You want me to be a builder. You want me to build a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael*. You want me to build people into greater *tzaddikim*, greater *shleimim*. The *gemara* says, that you know what *talmidei chachamim* are called? *Bana'im*, builders.

³ לוד אל תתחר במרעים. זה שאמר הכתוב (משלי כג יז) אל יקנא לבך בחטאים. ובמה תקנא (שם) ביראת ה' כל היום. אל תקנא בנרן של רשעים. ראה כמה שמן יש בו רביעיית או שמינית (אין לו אחרית) השמן שלם והנר מתכבה. וכן הוא אומר (שם כד כ) לא תהיה אחרית לרע. ואומר (שם) נר רשעים ידעך. הלכה האורה שלו. לכן דוד אומר אל תתחר במרעים. קנא בנר שאינו נדעך לעולם ואין הנר שלו פוסקת. שנאמר (שם ו כג) כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. לכן אל יקנא לבך. אמר הקב"ה קנא לי שאילולי הקנאה אין העולם מתקיים. לפי שאין אדם נושא אשה ובונה בית שאלמלא הקנאה שקינא אברהם להקב"ה לא היה קונה שמים וארץ. ואימתי קינא. כשאמר למלכי צדק כיצד יצאתם מן התיבה. אמר לו בצדקה שהיינו עושים. אמר לו וכי מה צדקה היה לכם לעשות וכי עניינים היו שם והלא לא היה אלא נח ובניו ועל מי הייתם עושים צדקה. אמר לו על החיה והבהמה והעוף. לא היינו יושבים כל הלילה אלא היינו נוטנים לפני זה ולפני זה. פעם אחת איתרונו ועצמו ויצא אבי משובר. אותה שעה אמר אברהם מה אלו אלולא שעשו צדקה עם בהמה חיה ועוף לא היו יוצאים משם ובשביל שאיחר עצמו כמעט קיבל שכרו ונשבר. אני אם אעשה עם בני אדם שהם בדמות וצלם של המלאכים על אחת כמה וכמה שנאלץ מן הפגעים. מיד (בראשית כא לג) ויטע אש"ל. אכילה שתיה לויה. וכן שלמה אמר (קהלת ד ד) וראיתי את כל עמל ואת כל כשרון המעשה כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו. לכן אל יקנא לבך בחטאים (מדרש תהילים ל"ו)

⁴ כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה. כי אמרתי עד עולם יבנה חסד דוד כמ"ש (שמואל ב ז: י"ג) והכינותי כסא ממלכתו וגו', ד"א סבור הייתי שיהא העולם בנוי בחסדך ותכין אמונתך בשמים שתהא נכונה ומקיימת ומה היא האמונה אותה התבטחה שהבטחת את דוד ע"י נתן הנביא לאמר כרתי ברית לבחירי להכין עד עולם זרעו (רש"י שם)

Many times - when I was amongst not such frum people - I have been asked “Rabbi, do you work?” and I could tell from their language, they were hoping I would say, “No.” Then they would jump on me. So I would answer them, “I work very hard.” “Oh, you do?! What field do you work in, Rabbi?” I would say, “I work in construction.” “Wow. What type of projects do you do?” I’d say, “I do all types of projects. I do small projects. I do major projects. I’m even looking for more projects.”

They start asking me questions. But of course, it was all projects of building people. I said, “You know the complexity of construction is amazing. The ideas that are available in building today. Today, there are so many aspects of building: the walls, the doors, the windows, the type of flooring, the roofing, the painting, the lighting, there are so many aspects.” They say, “Very nice. How did you get into it?” I said, “From *yeshivah*.” They said, “You learned that in *yeshivah*?!” I’d say, “Yes. I learned it all in *yeshivah*.” “What *yeshivah* was that?” You have to realize, you’re in the building trade. Hashem says, “Build.” We’re here to build.

Noach was *zocheh* - because of his *chessed* - to build worlds. The *zechus* that he had is unbelievable. We think the *zechus* of Noach was that he was saved through the *teivah*. That wasn’t his big *zechus*. His big *zechus* was that he was *mekayem* and *borei*. He was the vehicle that Hashem used to build the world as we know it. Just like *Adam Harishon* was the first builder, of the *mahadurah kamah* of the world, the first version - and that version, Hashem said *נחמתי כי עשיתי* - Noach and his sons were the founders and the builders of the second edition, the *mahadurah basri*. Avraham Avinu learned from that, and he started to build worlds too.

AVRAHAM COULD DO IT, AND WE CAN TOO

We learn from this an amazing thing. Avraham could have said, “You know what? It’s too late. It’s already done. Noach already built the world. What can I add?” But Avraham found a niche. He found an opening. “I’m going to build people,” and he built people.

You have to know that every single one of us has opportunities to build people. We’re surrounded by people all day long, and we have abilities to build ourselves and to build others. That’s called the *kina* of *yiras shamayim*. That’s called being *מקנא ביראת ה’ כל היום*. People who think small, people who think like midgets, they say, “I don’t like building!” They’re not jealous when they’re really supposed to be jealous.

We are descendants of Avraham Avinu, *baruch Hashem*, and not simple descendants of Noach. Let us continue to follow in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu and look for opportunities to build and to do something. It’s a great thing to be *mekarev rechokim*. It’s a much greater thing to be *mekarev kerovim*. You have to know that. Most people are unaware of that. They think that to be *mekarev rechokim* is much greater than to be *mekarev kerovim*. No. It’s not true. Let us undertake to build ourselves, make ourselves more *karov* and to help others become *karov* as well! Have a good Shabbos.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Noach was *zoiche* to build a brand new world, when he built the *teivah*. The purpose of the *teivah* wasn’t simply to save him and his family, along with all the creatures, from the waters of the *mabul*, but rather, like the Brisker Rav explains, it was built to create a brand new, self-contained world. The *teivah*’s precise measurements reflected how it had no connection whatsoever to the outside world that was about to be totally annihilated. This idea is also reflected in the question of Avraham Avinu to Shem, in what merit was Noach able to come out of the *teivah*, and build another whole new world? Noach was *zoiche* to build the new world with *tzedakah v’chesed* that he did in the *teivah*. We too, have many opportunities to build worlds and to build people in our lives. This coming week, *bli neder*, I will use the *kina* of *yiras shamayim* to look for opportunities to build a child, a spouse, a friend, a chavrusa, a co-worker, or even a stranger, with my small act of *chessed* or kind words of encouragement and *chizuk*. In the *zechus* of internalizing the true purpose of the *teivah* - amidst the turbulent and destructive, stormy waters of today’s pervasive outside culture - I will do my little part in sustaining, protecting and building my own world and those around me to enable us to be closer to Hashem.