

Parsha Ponders

Noach | October 24, 2020 | 7 Marcheshvan 5781

*Not just childrens' stories*¹

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים

The world stands on three things: On Torah, on *Avodah* (Divine service), and on *Gemillus Chassadim* (bestowal of loving kindness)

הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאין את האדם מן העולם

Jealousy, lust, and a desire for honor take a person out of the world²

If we analyze the stories that the Torah begins with, we'll see a recurring theme. Many of them show the shortcomings and failures of mankind. Adam and Eve failed to refrain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Their son Kayin murdered his brother Hevel. The generations in Noach's lifetime, before and after the flood, were abysmal. Murder and theft were rampant, and the result was the entirety of mankind, save for Noach and his family, were wiped out. Afterwards, their progeny chose to rebel against G-d, resulting in their dispersion. Why were all these failures recorded in the Torah? There must be some reason, as the Torah is the guidebook to living a proper life. What can we learn from all of these sins?

If we analyze these stories carefully, we'll see that they really encompass three specific sins. As well, if we examine the progress of history, with the arrival of the forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we'll see that they rectified these three sins. The world was in a state of darkness until these great heroes brought forth the light of their character and behavior. We are taught³ that the world rests on three pillars: Torah, *Avodah* (Divine service), and *Gemillus Chassadim* (bestowal of loving kindness). These three traits were characterized by Yaakov, Yitzchak, and Avraham, respectfully⁴. Opposite these traits are three sins which are so abhorrent the world can't tolerate them. As such, those who commit such vile acts, are taken out of the world. They are jealousy, lust, and a desire for honor⁵.

Jealousy was the root of the sin of Kayin⁶. He was jealous of his brother Hevel, who had his offering to Hashem accepted over his⁷. This jealousy was so strong that it led to his murdering his brother, committing the first murder in history. The Torah relates this crime to show us just how dangerous the trait of jealousy is, and how far it can go. It's teaching us just how low a person can sink from the influence of their jealousy.

The motivator for the generation of the flood was lust. They gazed at other women and desired them⁸, which led to them desiring everything they could get their hands on⁹. They plundered and murdered

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom *Noach* s.v. פרשיות החטאים הראשונים. For a similar *devar Torah*, see <https://parshaponders.com/vayechi-5778>

² Avos 1:2 and *ibid* 4:3

³ *ibid* 1:2

⁴ The Nesivos Shalom cites Zohar I p. 146b, but I didn't see it there.

⁵ Avos 4:3

⁶ The Nesivos Shalom addresses why the Torah described the sin of Adam eating from the Tree, as it had significant consequences for all generations. Every person has to rectify the damage caused by that sin. As it doesn't fit with the theme of the other stories, we didn't include it above

⁷ Genesis 4:4,5

⁸ *ibid* 6:4. This assumes בני האלהים means the mighty ones (Targum Onkelos ad. loc.)

⁹ The Nesivos Shalom cites this from ז"ע מרן בב"א, although I'm not sure who that is

until they got whatever it was that they wanted. The world was entirely corrupted until even the animals sinned and had to be wiped out. This all began from improper staring, coming from their uncontrollable lust. Similar to the trait of jealousy, the Torah is teaching us just how dangerous the trait of lusting is, and that it can take a person out of the world.

Finally, we are taught about the generation of the dispersion, the episode known as the Tower of Bavel. It was written for the same reason as the other stories. The trait of that generation was arrogance, and a desire for honor. They wanted to build a tower to Heaven, in order that they should have worldwide fame. The Torah is teaching us just how far this trait can go, and how dangerous it is. Hashem scattered them throughout the Earth, never to return to their homeland.

We see then that the Torah begins with the darkness of these three sins, of jealousy, lust, and a desire for honor. It then continues with the stories of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Avraham, with his trait of bestowing loving kindness to others, was the antithesis of jealousy¹⁰. Yaakov's Torah learning was the remedy for lust¹¹. Finally, Yitzchak's Divine Service was the only proper path towards combatting a desire of honor¹². With these three giants, light was brought into the world, which replaced the darkness brought about by these terrible episodes.

Good (*Motzei*) Shabbos

¹⁰ The Nesivos Shalom doesn't explain which traits of the Avos rectified which negative traits. Rabbi Ariel Shoshan of Scottsdale, AZ explained the Nesivos Shalom this way. This is also the logical correlation

¹¹ *Ibid.* Maharal in Derech Chaim to Avos *loc. cit.* also says this. Cf. Rav Asher Weiss (cited in <https://parshaponders.com/vayechi-5778>) who correlates Avraham's act of *chessed* with lust.

¹² Rabbi Ariel Shoshan