**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Midrash on the Parasha**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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In memory of David Yehuda Ben Shaul z”l (Mr. David Goldstein)

whose *shloshim* fell this week

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**Parashat Noach:**

**The Planting of the Vineyard**

**Introduction**

After the Flood, Noach emerges from the Ark and continues working toward the advancement of humanity. The Torah relates that Noach merits a Divine revelation, builds an altar and receives a Divine command regarding the future of mankind. Henceforth, he is meant to engage in human activity involving toil and creativity in order to rebuild his physical environment and to develop a new and stable human society fit for the Divine image in man.

However, Noach fails in his mission. The Torah describes the man who bridges the antediluvian and postdiluvian eras, who alone leads the world to survive both during and after the Flood, in humiliation and in shame.

And Noach the farmer began, and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent. (*Bereishit* 9:20-21)

Why does Noach fail in such a complete and immediate manner? Why does he lack the strength to build a new world? In this *shiur,* we will discuss a series of *derashot* in *Bereishit Rabba* relating to these verses, which provide several different answers to these questions. We will present the answers and discuss the lessons and meanings arising from them.

**Midrashic Explanations**

The *derashot* are reported in the names of many different Amoraim, most of them between the third and fifth generation, who lived in Eretz Israel: Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, Rabbi Berekhya, Rabbi Chiya bar Abba, Rabbi Yuda bar Simon, Rabbi Shemuel bar Yitzchak, and Rabbi Huna.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It should be noted that *Bereishit Rabba* is an exegetical Midrashic work, which cites the words of the Sages in accordance with the sequence of the words of the Torah. This characteristic finds clear expression in the series of *derashot* before us.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**He was Profaned**

Let us consider the first series of *derashot*:

"And Noach the farmer began (*vayachel*)" — he was degraded (*nitchalel*) and he made himself profane (*chullin*).

Why? Because "he planted a vineyard."

He should have planted something of use, such as a young fig-shoot or a young olive-shoot, but instead he planted a vineyard.

And from where did he procure it?

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: He took into the Ark with him vine-shoots for planting, and young shoots for fig trees and olive trees. As it is stated: "And you shall gather to you" (*Bereishit* 6:21); a man gathers in only what he will need [in the future]. (*Bereishit Rabba* 36, 20)

The first answer appearing in the Midrash is that Noach turns his back on the responsibility cast upon him in the post-Flood world. The words "he was degraded and he made himself profane" refer not only to the last stage of the enterprise of planting, at which Noach rolls about in his drunken stupor in the view of his son, but also to his intentions at the beginning. The *darshan* deems Noach's decision to begin with the planting of a vineyard as proof that he has no intention of occupying himself with the reestablishment of civilized society. By acting as he does, Noach attests to the fact that he is removing responsibility from his shoulders and not accepting any role in the new reality. The degradation and profanation are the very antithesis of sanctification and holiness. By taking this stance, Noach desecrates himself: who he is and what he has been through. In addition, the choice to focus on mundane matters is a desecration of the historic mission cast upon him and of the covenant between him and God.

According to Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, it would appear that Noach originally intends to occupy himself with the reestablishment of human society after the Flood. The very presence of the vine-shoots in Noach's hands is neither problematic nor surprising, as this is part of the legitimate and necessary preparatory actions for rebuilding society. If so, Noach's sin begins only after the Flood.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The Dynamics of Addiction to the Land**

The second answer appearing in the *midrash* indicates the reverse trend. Noach does not reject his role in the reestablishment of human society. On the contrary, he allows himself to be pulled into it to the point of oblivion and erasure of every other goal. For the sake of easier reading, we will divide the words of the *midrash* into three parts:

1.

"The farmer (*ish ha-adama*, literally: man of the ground)."

Three had a passion for the ground, and no good was found in them: Kayin, Noach and Uziyahu*.*

"Kayin was a tiller of the ground (*oved adama*)" (*Bereishit* 4:2).

Noach — "And Noach, the man of the ground, began."

Uziyahu — "And he had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields, for he loved the ground" (*II Divrei Ha-yamim* 26:10).

2.

"A farmer" ("a man of the ground”) — [he was so termed] because he saved the surface of the ground (he plowed and sowed), since for his sake, the ground was preserved,[[4]](#footnote-4) and because he filled the surface of the ground.

"A man of the ground" — one who works the ground for the sake of working the ground.

3.

Rabbi Berekhya said: Moshe was more beloved that Noach.

Noach, after having been called "a righteous man" (*Bereishit* 6:9), is called "a man of the ground." Moshe, however, after haven been called "an Egyptian man" (*Shemot* 2:19), is called "a man of God" (*Devarim* 33:1). He was more beloved than Noach who ended up as a castrate (*alum*).[[5]](#footnote-5)

The term *ish ha-adama* ("farmer," "man of the ground") in this verse is expounded in three ways: a characterization of Noach as belonging to a group of people with passion for working the land, Noach's manner and roles, and a comparison to Moshe. Kayin, Noach and Uziyahu all enjoy freedom of action that is virtually boundless, but each of them wastes the strength in their hands: Kayin, when he kills Hevel; Noach, when he drinks the wine produced from the grapes that he has grown in the vineyard; and Uziyahu, the king of the house of David who brings the kingdom of Yehuda to unprecedented economic prosperity, when he takes for himself the role of the priesthood and offers incense in the Temple.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The second part of the *derasha* relates to two aspects of Noach's activity regarding the ground: the first positive, the second negative.

The positive aspect expresses itself in the fact that he "for whose sake the ground was preserved" — because of whose righteousness the world continues to exist after the Flood — continues to reestablish it. Occupation with the land is the order of the day and Noach's purpose after the Flood: producing bread from the land, settling it, and filling it with people.

The negative aspect expresses itself in the words of the *midrash*: "One who works the ground for the sake of working the ground"; Noach becomes absolutely enslaved to the land, erasing and blurring his values ​​and the overall purpose of his work. As stated above, according to this, Noach does not intend from the beginning to detach himself from the partnership with God that he enjoys at the time of the Flood, but the demanding occupation with the land drives him crazy. According to this, the phrase "no good was found in them" in the *midrash* relates to God's expectations of Noach; it does not indicate that there is nothing good about Noach in general.

The comparison drawn between Moshe and Noach in the statement of Rabbi Berekhya, with which this section concludes, points to the contrast between Noach's spiritual erosion and Moshe's spiritual progress.[[7]](#footnote-7)

From these words of the *midrash*, it becomes clear that God expects Noach to act differently, and that he is responsible for his actions and their consequences.

**The Damage Caused by the Wine**

The last part of the *midrash* on these verses in *Bereishit* 9 points to a third explanation of Noach's dysfunction as he tackles reestablishing the world, namely, his occupation with wine:

1.

"And he planted a vineyard."

As he was going to plant the vineyard, the demon Shemadon met him and proposed: Come into partnership with me in this vineyard; but take care not to enter into my portion, for if you do, I will injure you.

2.

"And he drank of the wine, and was drunk."

He drank immoderately, and became intoxicated, and was put to shame.

Rabbi Chiya bar Ba said: On that very day he planted, on that very day he drank, and on that very day he was put to shame.

3.

"And he was uncovered [*vayitgal*]within his tent."

Rabbi Yuda bar Simon, Rabbi Chanan in the name of Rabbi Shemuel bar Yitzchak, said:

It is written not *vaygal*, but rather *vayitgal*. He was the cause of exile for himself and for subsequent generations.

The Ten Tribes were exiled only because of wine, as it is written: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink" (*Yeshayahu* 5:11).

The tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin were exiled only on account of wine, as it is written: "But these also [Yehuda and Binyamin] erred through wine"(*Yeshayahu* 28:7).

4. "Within his tent (*ohalo*)."

This is written as “*ohala* (her tent)” — within his wife's tent.

Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: When Noach was leaving the Ark, a lion struck and mutilated him. When he went to have relations with wife, his semen was scattered and he was humiliated.

5.

Rabbi Yochanan said: Beware of a passion for wine, because in this passage on wine, *vai* (woe) is written fourteen times.

As it is written: "And Noach the farmer began (*vayachel*), and planted (*vayita*) a vineyard. And he drank (*vayesht*) of the wine, and was drunken (*vayishkar*); and he was uncovered (*vayitgal*)… And Cham… saw (*vayar*)… and told (*vayaged*)his two brothers… And Shem and Yafet took (*vayikach*)… and laid (*vayasimu*) it upon both their shoulders and went (*vayelekhu*) backward, and covered (*vaykhasu*)*…* And Noach awoke (*vayikatz*)… and he knew (*vayeda*) what… had done to him. And he said (*vayomer*): Cursed be Kena’an.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The first three *derashot* address the dangers posed by wine to man and to the world at three different times: 1. while preparing the wine for drinking; 2. while drinking; 3. its consequences in the future. Already at the stage of planting the vineyard, Noach arouses destructive forces found in the world, which connect to him and take control of him.[[9]](#footnote-9) During the time of drinking, the danger that lies in wait is excessive drinking and its immediate consequences — drunkenness and humiliation. Rabbi Chiya bar Ba's *derasha*, "On that very day he planted, on that very day he drank, and on that very day he was put to shame," points to the insufferable ease with which one can slide down the slippery slope of drunkenness.[[10]](#footnote-10) And finally, in the long run, wine leads to exile.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Let us consider the meaning of the connection between wine and exile in the words of these Sages. Here the *darshan* removes the word *vayitgal* from its simple meaning, “and he revealed himself,” and expounds it as referring to exile, in order to point to a conceptual connection between them.[[12]](#footnote-12)Just as exile involves disconnecting a person from his natural place,[[13]](#footnote-13) so too drunkenness brings a person to forget himself; he distances himself from his essential being, from his duties, and from his mission. Mental exile leads to the possibility of exile in the geographical sense because geographical exile is a reflection of the mental state of a person or nation in the dimension of space.[[14]](#footnote-14) In an age of rebuilding the world, when humanity must take hold of the land anew, Noach's behavior leads to instability.

At the beginning of this *shiur*, we posed the question as to why Noach does not occupy himself with the rebuilding of the world. Thus far we have seen three answers in the *midrash*: Noach's distancing himself from God and from responsibility, his passion for the land, and wine. The fourth *derasha* opens a window to a more fundamental question that touches upon Noach's internal dynamics which drive him to distance himself from God, to be passionate about the land, and to drink himself into a stupor.

The connection of the fourth *derasha* to the issue of wine is not explicit. If we read it within the sequence of the verses, it turns out that an intoxicated Noach enters his wife's tent for the purpose of sexual relations, despite the impairment of his sexual functioning following the injury he receives from the lion. This *derasha* is the only one that links Noach's stay in the Ark during the course of the Flood to his behavior in its aftermath, while pointing to the wounds that he carries with him from the Ark, which find expression in the conjugal realm.[[15]](#footnote-15) This *derasha* may come to teach us that if a person has witnessed the destruction of his world, his ability to create a new world is impaired.[[16]](#footnote-16)

According to Rabbi Huna, does Noach's drunkenness lead to a lapse in judgment, as a result of which he enters his wife's tent despite his state. Rav Ze’ev Wolf (the Maharazav), ad loc., offers a different interpretation of the *midrash*:

But Noach, seeing that he was no longer fit to father children, separated from his wife… And Noach thought that if he drank wine, he would grow stronger, and heal and be able to father children… Therefore he planted a vineyard, and abstained from conjugal relations until he drank wine.

According to this, the *derasha* fits in well with the biblical verses and the rabbinic expositions, all of which are connected to wine. The entire story of the planting of the vineyard should be read as a failed attempt on the part of Noach to heal himself with wine, so that he would be able to engage in sexual relations and father children. The wine appears as a solution to Noach's existential problem created in the wake of his stay in the Ark. This account of Noach paints the picture of a figure who acts out of personal — and perhaps also marital — distress. However, the path adopted by Noach does not alleviate, but only exacerbates, his distress. The problem is not resolved; Noach is humiliated in his own eyes and in the eyes of his wife and children.[[17]](#footnote-17) On the other hand, had Noach not turned to wine and drunkenness, the chances are that he might have overcome his problem.

Here we come to the fifth *derasha*, thatof Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi Yochanan laments the figure of Noach. The multiple instances of "*vai*" in the section ring like a thousand bells proclaiming that everything could have been different.[[18]](#footnote-18) Noach has tremendous potential and great powers, even after the Flood, and he does not have to end his glorious work in such a base manner. Even if a person bears scars on his body and in his soul, he is expected to engage in the cultivation of civilized society and to contribute to humanity while accepting his limitations, and in no way may he dive into his problems in search of questionable solutions or in order to blur his clear consciousness and grasp of reality.

What should a person do if he has undergone a catastrophe and must now build his life anew? What should a person do if he has seen a world that has been built and then destroyed, and he has survived?

The series of *derashot* seem to issue a clear call not to give up even when this involves carrying the remains of the past. The *midrash* seems to be stating a clear message to such an individual: The world needs you, and you are responsible for your actions to yourself and to the world.[[19]](#footnote-19)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Rabbi Yochanan is the notable exception, as he was of the second generation; most of the Amoraim appearing here received traditions from his disciples or from the disciples of his disciples. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Regarding *Bereishit Rabba* as an exegetical Midrashic work arranged in accordance with the sequence of the verses (and not by topic), see Yona Frankel, *Midrash Ve-aggada* (Tel Aviv: 1997), pp. 780-781. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the face of it, it would have been possible to expound Noach's gathering of the various shoots in a negative manner, as part of his passion for the land, as we find later in the *midrash*. However, such an interpretation does not fit in with the manner in which the *derashot* are arranged here in the *midrash*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See ed. Theodor-Albeck, I, p. 337, note 7; there are many alternative readings in the manuscripts of this *midrash*; see apparatus there. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The word "*alum*" is obscure; see ed. Theodor-Albeck, ibid., note 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Regarding Uziyahu, see *II Divrei Ha-Yamim* 26. It is interesting to compare the words of the *midrash* here about the three who are passionate about the land to the parallel in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, 18, 27. There we find a list of four:

   Come and see how righteous were the descendants of Yitro, for Yonadav the son of Rekhav heard from a prophet that the Temple would eventually be destroyed, and he rose up and decreed three decrees on his descendants, that they not drink wine…

   From where did he learn that abstaining from wine extends life? For there were four who had a passion for the ground, and they were not found fit: Kayin, Noach, Lot and Uziyahu. Kayin: “And Kayin was a tiller of the ground” (*Bereishit* 4:2); Noach: "And Noach the farmer began” (*Bereishit* 9:20); Lot: “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan” (*Bereishit* 13:10). Uziyahu: “For he loved the ground” (*II Divrei Ha-yamim* 26:10)."

   It seems that the Tannaitic tradition in the *Mekhilta* has been integrated into *Bereishit Rabba*, omitting the name of Lot from the list. The verse cited in the *Mekhilta* about Lot reads: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sedom and Amora, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Tzo'ar" (*Bereishit* 13:10). Perhaps Lot is omitted from the list because there is no explicit mention in this verse of the word "*adama*." The *Mekhilta* expands upon the righteousness of Yitro and his descendants, the sons of Yonadav ben Rekhav, in the context of the story of Yitro's arrival at the camp of Israel, in contrast to *Bereishit Rabba,* which expounds the words "man of the ground" found in the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a broader discussion, see the commentary of Rabbi Shemuel Yaffe Ashkenazi, *Yefeh Toar*, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ed. Theodor-Albeck, III, pp. 337-339. The parallels of this *derasha* throughout rabbinic literature speak of 13 instances of *vai*. See BT *Sanhedrin* 70a. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See the parallel in *Midrash Tanchuma* ad loc. Demons are mentioned throughout rabbinic literature. For an expanded discussion, see Ephraim Urbach, *Chazal: Emunot Ve-de'ot* (Jerusalem), pp. 142-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Compare *Bereishit Rabba* 24, 2: "On that very day they were created, they had relations, and they had children." Abarbanel (ad loc.) explains this *derasha* as testifying to Noach's initial intention when he plants a vineyard for the sake of wine production. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Other sources in rabbinic literature that relate to the damage caused by wine include *Vayikra Rabba* 12, 1 and BT *Sanhedrin* 70a. The danger of wine is highlighted in relation to powerful leaders who establish dynasties or are destined to do so: Noach, King Shelomo, Nadav and Avihu. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The *darshan* ignores the plain meaning of the word *vayitgal* and expounds it in connection with exile. See ibn Ezra, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See the Maharal's introduction to his book, *Netzach Yisrael.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is similar to the case of Adam who is exiled from the Garden of Eden because of his sin and the case of the people of Israel who are exiled from their land when they do not properly fulfill their purpose.

    It should be noted that the *derasha's* mention of the Ten Tribes and of the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin, who are exiled because of wine, turns the occupation with the dangers of wine into a univeral matter that pertains to the Jewish people no less so than to the nations of the world. Compare *Midrash Tanchuma* (Warsaw), *Noach* 14:

    "Ánd he planted a vineyard” — Noach was one of four men who introduced four things. Noach introduced planting, as it is written: “And he planted a vineyard;” cursing when he said: “Cursed be Kena’an” (*Bereishit* 9:25); slavery when he said: “He shall be a slave to his brothers” (*Bereishit* 9:25); and drunkenness when “he drank of the wine, and was drunk…”

    Avraham introduced old age, trials, hospitality and legacies…

    Moshe introduced priesthood, religious service upon the platform, sacrifice, and the law…

    Bilam introduced gambling, plaiting the hair, sorcery and unchastity.

    In *Midrash Tanchuma,* Noach is presented as introducing corrupt practices in human society, as opposed to Avraham, who introduces models for a moral society. Noach's heir is Bilam, whereas Avraham's successor is Moshe. Bilam and Moshe represent the possibility of proper or improper connection to God. Positioning Noach and Bilam against Avraham and Moshe in *Midrash Tanchuma* points to the moral superiority of Israel as opposed to the nations of the world, and presents a perspective that is different from that which emerges from the *derasha* under discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Compare *Vayikra Rabba* (Margaliot), 20, 1. There the *derasha* about the lion that injures Noach appears without reference to the realm of marital relations. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It is Noach's sons who are active in the post-Flood world. See *Bereshit* 9:1, 8, 18-19. Also see *Bereishit Rabba* 36, p. 336:

    "He breaks in pieces mighty men” (*Iyov* 34:24) — the people of the generation of the Flood acted wickedly with their evil deeds; “without inquisition’ — there is no inquisition regarding their evil deeds; “and sets others in their stead” — these are the sons of Noach, “And the sons of Noach were." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The sons of Noach may be compared to the daughters of Lot: incest, wine, sleep, reproduction, children uniting to do something to their father, and a father who leaves the scene after a catastrophe. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Compare the *derasha* in *Midrash Tanchuma*, cited above in note 14. That *derasha* lacks the lament about Noach, and it relates to him as the founder of base human culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Abarbanel in his commentary (ad loc.) relates to Noach's difficulty with the post-Flood world: "Scripture relates that whereas before the Flood there were vines with grapes to be eaten, there was no vineyard, with vines ordered in rows, from which to produce wine, until Noach came, and from the vine-shoots that he brought with him into the Ark he planted a vineyard with vines ordered in rows in order to extract wine from the grapes. Perhaps when he loathed his life because of the Flood waters, he wanted to make wine to drink, so that he would drink no more water and never see water again." [↑](#footnote-ref-19)