

MEN OF STEAL

By Ozer Bergman

“God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me. The world is full of robbery. Therefore I will destroy with the earth’” (Genesis 6:13). On “the world is full of robbery,” Rashi comments: Their fate was sealed only because of robbery (see *Sanhedrin* 108a).

“Once a person allows himself to steal from others, he’s liable to commit every sin there is. Unless he changes his attitude, there is no remedy to get him off his evil path” (*The Aleph-Bet Book, Theft and Robbery A:1*).

Everywhere you go, even where it isn’t found, even before it existed for us, the Torah is there and was there. It had to be. The world is built from the Torah and founded on the Torah (*Zohar, Terumah* 2:161a). And the world exists on undeserved kindness, because there’s really no reason at all that we can give for why we are here. God just wants to be nice to us. (Whatever it may mean that God “wants” something. See *Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom* #40.)

But for the world to go round, we have to be kind to one another. This is part of the *derekh erez* (way of the world) that precedes Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3). And the most basic part of being kind to one another, the part that is absolutely indispensable, is being civil to one another. This *derekh erez* and civility is the common denominator of the Seven Noahide Mitzvahs.

(Kindly allow me a digression. Usually the Hebrew expression *Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach* is translated as the Seven Noahide Laws. This is not only technically incorrect, but does a disservice to Noahides. A law is a rule that one ought to obey. A mitzvah must also be obeyed, but whereas obeying the law keeps you out of trouble, obeying a God-given mitzvah connects you to God, its Giver. Noahides who keep the Seven Mitzvahs are connecting to God.)

Derekh erez doesn’t just mean being polite and courteous. *Derekh erez*, the way of the world, is a way we influence Heavenly interaction toward the world. How we human beings interact with one another

precipitates how Heaven will interact with us. If people act destructively toward one another, well, why should we expect Heaven to act any better toward us? If we steal from one another, Heaven will “steal” from us (e.g., famine). If we are unjustifiably violent, Heaven may also be violent (e.g., war, hurricanes).

A clear, rational mind obligates a person to respect another’s ownership of what he has produced or purchased. Stealing—including underhanded dealings, cunning dishonesty to remain within the law, lack of conscientiousness toward a fellow human being—is contradictory to the fabric of Creation, the antithesis of *derekh erez*. Those who cannot abide by that minimum of basic decency should not expect anything better in return.

Let’s up the stakes. “The earth and that all that it holds is God’s” (Psalms 24:1). That includes “the world and its inhabitants” (*ibid.*). “Inhabitants” includes you. Since you are a reader of *Pathways*, I’m certain that you’ve never taken any pens home from the office, borrowed something without asking, or claimed any iffy tax-exemptions. But how about things that God owns? The Talmud teaches, “Anyone who enjoys something in this world without [saying the appropriate] blessing, it’s as if he robs the Blessed Holy One and the Jewish people” (*Berakhot* 35b).

“God gave the earth to mankind”—after we thank Him for it (*Berakhot* 35a-b). But it’s not just bread and wine, or fruits and vegetables that God owns. He owns our arms and legs, our heads and hearts. God owns our very breath. We have to be very careful not to misappropriate—rob—any of these gifts from their true Owner by using them in objectionable ways. God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, but we do have to give our best effort to be as honest as we can be.

*A gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

Based on *Likutey Halakhot,
Gezeilah* 3:5

SIDEPATH

The Rebbe once encouraged one of his followers to be happy. He said, “You should rejoice in God. Even if you don’t realize God’s greatness, you can rely on me. For I know His greatness.”

The Rebbe encouraged another of his followers to make himself happy even in his everyday affairs. He said, “This is certainly the way. First make yourself happy with worldly things. Do this to the best of your ability and you will eventually be worthy of true joy” (*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom* #177).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

6:9 Noah walked with God

For A Tzaddik, Death Is Like Moving From One Room To Another

The Torah speaks as if Noah were dying (he “walked with God”), leaving behind his contemporaries.

When a tzaddik passes away, that is no loss to him, for he is great and respected in the World to Come—there, he is “walking with God.” But those who are left behind suffer a great loss (i.e. a “Flood”) (*LM* II, 67).

6:14 Make the ark with compartments

Clean Speech Begets Peace And Unity

KiNim (קנים, compartments) is similar to *KeiN* (קן, bird’s nest) (*Bereishit Rabbah* 31:9).

The Talmud teaches that the disease *tzara’at* (often mistranslated as “leprosy”) is a punishment for evil speech (*Erakhin* 16). In order to be purified of *tzara’at*, a person must bring a sacrifice of birds—for, as our Sages state: “Let the chattering birds come and effect forgiveness for the chattering person” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 16:7).

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Teivah (ark) also means “word.” A person’s “ark,” his refuge from the floodwaters of negativity that overwhelm him, consists of his rectifying his every “word.”

Thus, our Sages associate the ark’s compartments with bird’s nests—which are reminiscent of the bird sacrifices that a person brings in the course of rectifying his speech. And when a person attains exemplary speech, that creates purity and eventually leads to peace and unity (LM I, 14:9).

6:16 Finish it to a cubit from above

One Must Strive To Speak Truthfully

The initial letters of the words *Amah Tekhalehah Mi-lemma’alah* (אמה תכלנה מלמעלה, finish it to a cubit from above) spell *EMeT* (אמת, truth). A person’s words must be true especially when viewed from the Heavenly aspect—from “Above.”

AMaH (אמה, cubit) indicates speech. The first two letters of this word, *Aleph* (א) and *Mem* (מ), stand for *Eish* (אש, fire or heat) and *Mayim* (מים, water or fluids), with which a person produces speech. The letter *hei* (ה) has the numerical value of 5 and indicates the five phonetic sounds (guttural, palatal, lingual, dental and labial) (LM I, 112).

7:22 All that had the breath of life in their nostrils...died

Even Our Breath Can Affect Others

Our speech is not the only thing that makes an impact on other people; even the breath we breathe can affect others. God commanded Noah to closet himself in an ark to escape the punishment of the wicked, for the breath of those evildoers was enough to sway him to sin. The Torah states: “All that had the breath of life in their nostrils...died,” for it was their evil breath that contaminated the air and caused Noah to flee. Furthermore, the Talmud teaches that the Flood did not enter the Holy Land (*Zevachim* 113b). So how did the evil people who were living there die during the Flood? The Talmud answers that they died from the *hevel*, from the air! (LH VIII, p. 164a).

9:2 The fear and dread of you will be upon all the wild beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky

Anger Causes Us To Lose Our Godly Image

When a person possesses “the image of God,” other creatures fear him. When he grows angry, however, that “image of God” leaves him (LM I, 57:6).

11:4 A tower with its top in the heavens

Self-Serving Individuals Distance Others From God

The Tower of Babel was built for self-aggrandizement. Its builders wanted to serve themselves and separate from God. They were not fools who thought they could ascend to Heaven and “fight” God. Rather, they wanted to use philosophies and evil intentions to produce atheism. The same applies to those who build synagogues and other types of religious institutions with selfish intent: they distance people from God (LH I, p. 248a).

11:26 Abram

The Supernal Heart Energizes One Who Desires To Serve God

Our Sages teach that Abraham had no spiritual teacher. From whence did he learn about God? His kidneys became two fountains that flowed with Godly wisdom (*Bereishit Rabbah* 95:3).

Sometimes a person has a deep yearning to serve God and study Torah, but is unable to do so, for whatever reason. This powerful desire reaches the Supernal Heart, upon which Torah teachings are inscribed. The Supernal Heart makes it possible for him to serve God despite his lack of knowledge. Then—like Abraham—he will be energized from within himself to draw close to God (LM I, 142).

KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

17 — “It happened as they emptied their sacks” (Genesis 42:35) (continued)

5. When fear and love of God are obscured for a person, it is because the light of the tzaddik—from whom one receives fear and love of God—has grown dark for him. Even though the tzaddik is radiating light in all the worlds, and most of all in this world, nevertheless, the tzaddik does not shine for this person at all due to the great darkness that encompasses him. Although the person may be in the presence of the tzaddik and sitting right there with him, he is unable to taste, to understand and to see the tzaddik’s great light, through which he would be able to come to the ultimate, eternal good.

6. All this is a consequence of this person’s evil deeds, by which his intellect has become darkened with foolishness, or more specifically, with specious opinions. He, however, believes himself to be wise, and he harbors questions about the true tzaddik. But all these false opinions, questions and convoluted ideas are nothing but utter stupidity and foolishness. It is just that the impurity of the person’s deeds has darkened his intellect with this foolishness. Consequently, the light of the tzaddik is obscured for him, and because of this, he does not possess fear and love of God.



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