



Ohr Yerushalayim News

13th October 2018 - Volume 11 - Issue 14 - נח - ד מרחשון תשע"ט

News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to the Rov & Rebbetzen on the recent birth of a great granddaughter to Mr and Mrs Yisroel Meir Cohen.

סעודה שלישית

סעודה שלישית restarts this week after the second minyan for Mincha. Please try and assist with the cost of the סעודה by sponsoring or jointly sponsoring a week. Please put your name against a Sedra on the list on the notice wall in the foyer – weekly cost is £65.

לֵּסֵּת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים – Lest we forget

Dani Epstein

Countless theories have been proposed to elucidate the motivations, enterprise and conclusion of the Generation of the Dispersion (Bereishis 11). The text describing one of the most pivotal events in the development of mankind is terse consisting of a mere nine verses, yet waxes almost lyrically loquacious in its description of the construction materials and processes involved. The associated midrashim are replete with contradictions to the extent that the Abravanel rejects them as "irreconcilable within the literal meaning of the verse". He does observe, however, that they are rich and deep in other meanings and allusions; consequently we dismiss them at our peril – they are after all the words of Chazal – but we are forced to relegate them in order to forge ahead.

First, let us examine the facts at hand. Humanity at that time lived in one nomadic tribe, with a political system that might have been described as, to quote the immortal words of the Pythonesque economist Dennis, an "anarchosyndicalist commune" where "supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses". They were monolingual and equally were of "singular words" – דברים אחדים – when one fine day they encountered a valley in the land of Shinor and settled there. At some point thereafter, the group mutually agreed to undertake an enterprise involving the manufacturing of bricks and ersatz mortar, subsequently this was extended to include the construction of a city and a tower of Brobdingnagian proportions that would make the Burj Khalifa seem positively Lilliputian, the purpose thereof to "create a name" for themselves, lest they become scattered over the face of the earth. Alas and alack, Hashem eventually did scatter them over the face of the earth, and they ceased to build the city.

Now we are in the position to pose some questions. What exactly does "singular words" mean? What prompted the change from a nomadic life to an urban one? Why the overly informative description of the construction materials? In fact, why describe them altogether? Although constructing a city appears to be a sensible proposition, what purpose would the tower have served? What was their sin? Did they in fact sin?

There are various approaches attempted in order to answer these and other questions to which the Abravanel raises numerous objections.

The most frequently offered theory to explain both the tower and their collective transgression is that they wanted to undertake war with Hashem, hence the importance of building a very tall tower and the consequent dispersion.

In order for this to hold any credence, everyone amongst the group would have had to approve of the plan. Everyone including Noach, Shem and Avrohom who were all alive at the time, bearing in mind that all of humanity lived together at that point. While Avrohom might not have convinced them with the brilliance of his logic, surely Noach or Shem would have dissuaded from the futility of their proposition them with their experiences.

לעלו נשמת דוב יצחק ב"ר אפרים אלחנן ז"ל

סעודה שלישית

It is obligatory for every man and woman to eat three meals on Shabbos - one at night and two by day. To fulfil this מצוה in the best possible way bread, at least the size of an egg, should be consumed at each meal.

In the event that this is not possible then at least cake or other מזונות food is acceptable, בדיעבד.

It is apparent from the above especially in the winter, that one should reduce one's food intake at קידוש, and lunch in order to enjoy one's סעודה שלישית in the best possible manner.

If the tower was to act as a refuge were a flood to strike again, surely Noach had informed all of his descendants of the promise Hashem made never to flood the world again, rendering such a tremendous task unnecessary. Furthermore, the last place one would construct a tower that would "reach the heavens" would be on a waterlogged clay substrate; after all Chazal observed (Maseches Shabbos 113) that the valley of Shinor was named after the fact that all the flood waters gathered there while receding. A far more suitable site would be atop a mountain where stone, a far more durable material, would be in plentiful supply and the height of the location would provide a head start. In the interests of hammering home the final nail, a pyramid (a shape that would allow brick to be used as well as the construction of exterior ramps for logistical purposes, considering the load pressures involved at the base layer) 1km wide and tall would have a volume of roughly 330,000,000 cubic meters. Employing fireclay brick with a specific gravity of 2.4 yields a result of – drum roll please – 792,000,000,000 tons. All those zeroes are not a mistake. Assuming a brick weighs approximately 3.5kg then the amount required would be roughly 226,285,714,285,714 give or take a brick or two. All this for just one kilometre in height! Granted, there are ways and means to build to that height with a far smaller footprint such as a sharp cone, however that would require iron reinforcement at the very least which was not something their technology had developed yet. When we additionally consider how much fuel would be required to fire those bricks and the pitch which was used as mortar the proposition launches firmly in the outer reaches of the ludicrous.

So, perhaps they did not sin after all, as the Ibn Ezra and Rambam postulate? Is

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת נח

זמן שבת	6.04pm
Mincha	6.09pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	10.13am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Shiur	5.17
2nd Mincha	5.47pm
Seuda Shlishis	Following
Motzei Shabbos	7.07pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	5.55pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

it possible that Hashem dispersed them in order to ensure the world would be populated, or as a preventative measure in the case of a natural disaster possibly wiping out humanity in one fell swoop? This too seems implausible, since they had been living together from the point of embarkation of the Teyvoh, and it was only after they undertook this project that they were dispersed. As it is, given time the pressures of the population would have precipitated a natural dispersion.

The Abravanel is most resistive to the Ran's theory that the appointment of King Nimrod and his subsequent introduction of idolatry was the cause of their punishment on the grounds that the verses do not mention this at all and simply introducing languages will not in any way prevent a king ruling over a multitude conversing in different tongues, viz. Achashveirosh who did precisely that. Additionally I observe that Avrohom and certainly Noach and Shem would absolutely not tolerate a monarch introducing idolatry and they would have at the very least left the group, something which did not occur. If, on the other hand, they were coerced into cooperating then describing the group as "דברים אחדים" would be a misdescription.

After all this one begins to wonder what exactly was going on and more importantly what we can learn from this rather brief interlude in our history.

The answer lies in something we are now experiencing yet again, albeit in a far more complex and sophisticated manner.

Recently due to one thing or another I have had the unfortunate experience of becoming exposed to politics in all its vile glory. I had little if any interest in the whole minefield previously and therefore its current incarnation simply blew my mind. Simply put, the previous demarcations between the left and right were broadly quite clear; on the one hand were the proponents of unproven economic models with their equally unpredictable social axioms, whereas the right favoured a capitalistic model of one flavour or the other whilst the liberals gathered splinters from spending far too much time on the fence.

Today, however, we see the rise of an entire new social order, that of entitlement, triggering, race and intelligence class wars, the promotion of alternative lifestyles as the central tenet for the survival of humanity and much more. This sort of thinking has pervaded all areas and tiers of society thanks to the ubiquity of the internet and since many of the ideologues employ low-brow psychology the masses are generally appealed to successfully without questioning the postulates of the arguments. Therein lies a horrifying prospect of a general and precipitous decline of humanity's civilisation. Allow me to alarm you.

Within the social sciences and in fact the humanities in general the natural tendencies within these disciplines, if any of them can be referred to as such, is to lean to the left. At least this was previously the tendency. Today, however, this has morphed from some harmless if hapless ideologies to a militant support of policies, axioms and morals that smash their heavy fists into any dissenters in a violent, fascist, bacchanalian rampage.

This has spread beyond the hallowed halls of academia and into the broader public life to the extent that a very prominent rabbi of the Orthodox persuasion recently penned a learned introduction to a pamphlet published for schools – Jewish schools – on how to integrate children within the educational environment of such institutions who subscribe to a lifestyle that is antithetical to anything adherents of the Torah would regard as remotely acceptable. The entire production was embellished with quotes from Tenach and Chazal to varnish the appalling publication with a thin veneer of respectability. We can no longer claim that we are sufficiently insulated and remain immune.

How did this happen? How could this happen? The Dor Haflogoh, the Generation of the Dispersal, shows us how.

Examine the words very carefully. Initially in the post-apocalyptic world everyone spoke one language. More importantly they were united politically and lived the simple life of nomadic hunter-gatherers; the social order was free of any hierarchies, hegemonies or any other kind of communal structure. This was key to their undisturbed existence, since ownership was irrelevant – there was not much to be had. Food was plentiful, water was a freely available resource and under these conditions their temperaments were calmed and ordered; unity prevailed since there was nothing much to argue about. There was no need for an economic system of any description, it simply made no sense because there was nothing of value anyone owned that someone else could not acquire for themselves. They were of דברים אחדים since there was nothing much to argue about.

This all sounds terribly leftist and happy clappy, but bear with me. I do confess however that if this was not the Abravanel I would have fallen about laughing.

Consider the situation of Kayin and Hevel. The latter chose to become a shepherd since that occupation would prevent him from becoming a slave to the land. Even Noach, who planted a vine, was a "master of the land"

(Bereishis 9:20); he was not subjugated to its demands. Kayin on the other hand went into agriculture, a very demanding vocation that requires constant labour. Whilst his brother's occupation afforded him time to contemplate humanity's purpose and develop a just and upright society, Kayin left himself no such opportunity. Without careful and time-consuming consideration of every moral axiom, examining these hypotheses and a deep intellectual engagement in the formation of one's society, the baser instincts rise to the surface at a breathtaking speed. Thus our forefathers and other luminaries within our intellectual firmament such as Yosef, Moshe and Dovid opted for the simpler lifestyle of the shepherd within which they were able to develop the clarity of their wisdom.

Now a new order rose: "ויאמרו איש אל-רעהו – and they said to one another..." Who initiated this dialogue? Cush to Put, and Put to Canaan (Medrash Tanchuma 18:9); the ideological descendants of Kayin who wanted to create a hegemony for themselves, but were well aware they needed the masses to fulfil their dreams.

First the suggestion was the development of rudimentary construction technology. "Let's see if we can make bricks and some kind of mortar." So, clay, pitch and fuel were gathered and eventually they perfected the process. Once this method yielded results they made a further suggestion: "How about a city? That way we have houses and no longer have to worry about the weather. Oh, and a monument to our genius as well."

Through persuasion and some reasoned arguments society went about a dramatic shift. Now they needed people to gather firewood, clay mixers, brick shapers, brick carriers, brick layers, pitch makers and so on. Professions that were previously unknown sprang up and during this process Hashem injected the concept of "jargon". Yes, a really simple concept, but every trade now decided to create their own terminology and nomenclature to describe their processes, tasks and skills. Now they were no longer of דברים אחדים; in the rush to create a new world order they lost the absolute unity they enjoyed previously. These distinctions bred disunity with the result that groups began to break away, fuelled by the newly born desire to create and own "things". That desire, and the processes that buttressed their fruition created gradients of opportunity and outcomes; concomitant with that came jealousy, and with that animalistic drive came fear. As a great philosopher will say: fear is the path to the dark side: fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering.

When society is unconcerned with the equality of opportunity and obsessed with equality of outcome, when society is willing to ignore reality and exchange it for the unicorns and mermaids of pseudo-intellectual discourse, then the door is opened to the reincarnation of unbridled licentiousness in the guise of axiomatic righteousness and moral turpitude is elevated to a virtuous enterprise, a Pandora's box of vacuous ethicality is dignified with institutions and constitutions that promote the collapse of rectitude and everything that is equitable.

As in those days, so it is today. We literally have a new language describing the imaginary world the intellectually moribund and vapid wish the world truly was and they steamroller legislation that enforces their debauched and lunatic socio-economic world view on those who want no truck with their skewed mindset. We have a new world order, where the polar opposites of the spectrum have little to differentiate themselves. Labourites and Tories by and large sing from the same hymn book, with a mere handful of differences worth mentioning. Muddled across the spectrum though are the new political action groups, the Antifas, SJWs and unmentionable groups who are screaming their way left, right and centre and forcing their agendas down everyone's throats; if you are dissenter then Heaven help you, because they will resort to whatever they can get away with to further their cause.

What has facilitated this cosmic shift is the economic prosperity which we enjoy today – unprecedented in mankind's history – and the introduction of a raft of terminology that previously was unknown, in much the same way the Generation of the Dispersal precipitated their degeneracy once they engaged in industry and commerce. Wealth, industry and commerce are a double-edged sword, as the posuk denotes: "וישמו ישראל ויבנטו – Yeshurun became fat and rebelled".

Inasmuch as power corrupts, so does affluence.

We can no longer hunker down in the hope the storm will pass us by. At the moment, we are losing. Losing because we are not a people of whom one can say we are of דברים אחדים. We are not a people who engage with broader society beyond our daled amos and reach out to those who are essentially fighting our fight but are being crushed under the might of the new socialism on one side and neo-fascism on the other. We ignore the history of mankind at our peril. Not for nought is this incident recounted in the Torah, because within it lies a stark warning for us and all of mankind.