

The Steipler zt"l explains in the following way. Noach had an incredibly strong intellectual belief that the flood would come but not a real tangible belief. He believed but didn't believe...

If we had a court date set during which our fate and the fate of our family was going to be decided, we would be frantic with preparations. For weeks beforehand we'd be discussing different strategies, different angles through which we could present ourselves in the most favorable light. The night before we'd be tossing and turning, barely getting a few moments of sleep. Yet, on the days leading up to Rosh Hashana, when we know that we and our families are being judged and our fate for the forthcoming year is being decreed, our only worry is how long the services will take... We believe in Rosh Hashana being a day of judgment on an intellectual level but not on a tangible, practical level...

The Talmud [Brachos 28] relates that when Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai was ill, his students approached him for a blessing. His blessing was that their fear of heaven should be equal to their fear of man. The students were shocked. Shouldn't the fear of heaven be that much greater than the fear of man? He responded that when a person sins, his main concern is that no one should see him. Intellectually, the fear of heaven is greater. Tangibly, the fear of man is much greater.

The following story, found in Rabbi Twerski's Not Just Stories, beautifully illustrates the power of a tangible understanding. Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin had a chassid by the name of Reb Yitzchak. He was extremely poor but that never really bothered him. Who was he to tell Hashem how to distribute worldly assets? When he had an audience with the Rebbe his only requests were for guidance in spiritual growth.

Reb Yitzchak had a daughter of marriageable age but no dowry to offer a prospective groom. His wife pleaded with him to ask the Rebbe for a blessing. He assured her that he would, but when he next visited Kobrin and came before the Rebbe, he forgot about earthly concerns and again asked the Rebbe only for spiritual guidance.

Reb Yitzchak's wife lost patience with him. "If I can't rely on you then I'll have to go to the Rebbe myself!" Reb Yitzchak promised that next time he'd ask the Rebbe.

On his next trip to Kobrin, keeping to his word, he explained his plight to the Rebbe. Rav Moshe listened carefully and then said, "I will bless you with wealth but you first must do as I say."

He took out two gold coins and told Reb Yitzchak that he must follow his instructions without the slightest deviation. "Go home and use this money to buy the finest food, wine and delicacies available. Set the table for yourself and only you may eat from this food. Eat as much as you want but neither your wife or your children can taste even a morsel of it. Then come back here."

Reb Yitzchak was a loyal chassid and did as he was told. His wife and children watched as he ate his sumptuous meal. He saw their mouths water as he lifted each forkful to his mouth. Seeing their expressions, he could hardly swallow the food. Yet the Rebbe had said that he must eat. The torment he experienced eating before his hungry family and not sharing with them was the worst torture he had ever felt in his entire life. When Reb Yitzchak returned to Kobrin, the Rebbe said to him, "I will bless you with wealth and you and your family will have an abundance of everything. But, how much will you be able to enjoy it knowing that there are poor people with nothing to eat all day? The blessing for wealth is yours for the asking, Yitzchak. Do you still want it?"

"Never!" Reb Yitzchak exclaimed and he went home empty handed.

Reb Yitzchak's wife visited the Rebbe and did ask for the blessing. His fortunes improved and he became quite wealthy. Both he and his wife gave generously to the poor, but Reb Yitzchak never ate another meal at home. He funded the soup kitchen and ate each meal there along with the poor...

The tangible experience of eating heartily while others were hungry was one that he never forgot.

A Place To Be

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig (Torah.org)

"And it came to pass after the seven-day period that the waters of the Flood were upon the earth"(7:10)

According to most Halachic opinions "shiva", the seven day mourning period observed after the death of a close relative, is not a Torah-mandated obligation, rather a Rabbinical institution. Rashi cites an allusion to shiva from this week's parsha. After Noach completed construction of the Ark, Hashem delayed the onset of the rains for seven days. Rashi cites the Midrash which states that Hashem waited until after the righteous Metushelach passed away, before punishing the world. The seven days preceding the flood was the shiva period observed after his passing.

It is customary to comfort a mourner with the statement "Hamakom yenchem eschem besoch she'ar aveilei Tzion v'Yerushalayim" – "Hashem (lit. "the Place") should comfort you among the rest of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem".³ Hashem has other names, such as "Rachum" or "Chanun" which reflect His mercy and compassion, and they would therefore seem more appropriate for this occasion. Why do we use the appellation "Makom" – "Place" in this case? How is this statement a source of comfort for a mourner?

Regarding Hashem, the Midrash states "M'komo shel olam v'lo Ha'olam mekomo" – "the world is contained within Hashem's space and not Hashem within the space of the world".⁴ Our Sages are teaching us that space was not a preexisting reality. Rather, when Hashem brought the world into existence, He created the reality of space. Consequently, Hashem does not exist within space; space exists within Hashem's reality.

The name of Hashem which reflects this notion is "Makom" – "Place". It is therefore appropriate to specifically use the appellation "Makom" when comforting a mourner. The sense of loss precipitated by the death of a loved one stems from the feeling that the deceased no longer exists within the same reality as the living. In times when long distance communication was non-existent, the migration of a family member to a distant country would not invoke the same sense of loss as the loss brought on by death, for there is comfort in knowing that a loved one continues to exist within the same space as us. The appellation "Makom" is reflective of the notion that everything is within Hashem's space. Therefore, even though the departed has left our own perceived reality, he continues to exist within Hashem's created reality.

Although he may be on a different plane of existence, he continues to share the same space as us. This concept is a great source of comfort to the bereaved.

The Holy Ark

"two by two they came to Noach..." (7:9)

In this week's parsha, Hashem instructed Noach to build a "teivah" – "ark". When the teivah was completed, the animals and birds came to Noach on their own volition.¹ Citing a Midrash, Rashi states that only those animals that remained faithful to their species, not corrupting their way, were accepted by the teivah.² Presumably, it was Hashem who instructed Noach as to which animals to permit aboard. Why does Rashi phrase his comments in a manner which implies that the teivah determined whether or not to permit entrance to the animals? Why does the Torah dedicate so many verses to the description of the teivah? What is gained by our knowing each detail of the teivah's construction?

The Midrash cites a verse from Koheles which states "When the spirit of the Administrator is upon you, leave not your place".³ The verse, explains the Midrash, is alluding to Noach who did not take leave of the teivah until Hashem instructed him to do so by saying "Go forth from the Ark".⁴ The Midrash concludes that Noach understood that just as he needed permission to enter the teivah, he needed permission to take leave of it as well.⁵ Why did Noach need authorization to leave the teivah?

The Ramban comments that the sheer number of different species of animals, in addition to the food required to sustain them, could not possibly be accommodated by the dimensions of the teivah. Clearly, the entire voyage was of a miraculous nature.⁶ Living under miraculous conditions translates into a greater manifestation of Hashem's presence. The teivah was a vehicle which housed Hashem's presence and contained tremendous levels of "Kedusha" – "sanctity". The Roke'ach makes the connection between the teivah and the Aron Kodosh used to house the Torah, which is also referred to in the Talmud as a teivah.⁷ Since this was such a holy place Noach needed permission to enter and take leave of it. This message is delivered by the Midrash when it cites the verse "When the spirit of the Administrator (i.e. Hashem's holiness) is upon you, leave not your place".

The Holiness of the teivah would not tolerate any animals that had corrupted their way. Therefore, Rashi states that only those animals that remained faithful to their species were accepted by the teivah. Throughout the Torah we find that when a place or vessel is being constructed to house Hashem's Kedusha, the dimensions and descriptions of the item are recorded in great detail. Similarly, the Torah elaborates upon the construction of the teivah.

Traditionally, at the end of each parsha a word is formed containing the numerical value of the number of verses in it. This word is known as the "siman" and alludes to an important theme discussed in the parsha. Parshas Noach has the siman "Betzael", who was the architect of the Mishkan and the individual who built the teivah which housed the "luchos".