



ECHOES OF RASHI

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Maggid Shiur All Parsha and All Daf, OU.org

L'zecher Nishmat **Imma Morasi Shulamis bat HaRav Shmuel Tzvi Halevi a"h**

MARINE BIOLOGY

כל אשר נשמת רוח חיים באפו מכל אשר
בחרבה מתו: (זכ"ב)

*All in whose nostrils was the merest
breath of life, all that was on dry land,
died.*

רש"י: "אשר בחרבה" - ולא דגים שבים
(סנהדרין ק"ח ע"א).

*"(All) that was on dry land (died)" –
and not the fish in the sea (Sanhedrin
108a).*

The Torah describes the devastation of the *Mabul*: "*Kol asher nishmas ruach chaim b'apav*" – anything that breathed, anything alive, anything that had life within it, died. Then, almost redundantly, a second clause appears: "*Mikol asher b'charavah meisu*." Anything on dry land died. That second phrase seems to qualify the first. Why repeat the point?

Rashi explains that the fish in the ocean did not die, *lo dagim shebayam*. Because

they were not part of the *charavah*, the dry land, they were spared. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* supports this. The fish were exempt from this destruction.

Why is it important for the Torah to tell us that the fish survived?

One answer, from the Gemara in *Zevachim*, is that the fish were less implicated. The moral breakdown that began in the human world spread outward to land animals. There were forms of corruption described by Chazal, including unnatural mixing that distorted the created order. The corruption had spread into the moral and ecological order. The fish, however, remained largely untouched by that corruption. They were spared.

In other words, the *Mabul* was not a blind or indiscriminate act. Where guilt existed, devastation followed; where innocence remained, life remained. The fish stand as a counterpoint to how other animals behaved. Hashem preserves what does not deserve destruction, even when the rest of the world is collapsing.

There is also a broader theological layer. The *Mabul* represents a reversal of *Ma'aseh Bereishis*. The world failed, and so Hashem, as it were, returns creation to *tohu va'vohu*, the state before formation.

How is creation reversed? On Day Two, Hashem separated the upper waters from the lower waters. On Day Three, He gathered the waters so dry land could emerge.

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The *Mabul* reverses that process. Water descends from above – *v'arubos hashamayim niftachu* – and erupts from below – *nivke'u ma'ayanos tehom*. The boundaries collapse. The world returns to a submerged, unformed state.

Within that framework, perhaps only certain layers of creation are undone. Beings that were created on Day Six – human beings and land animals – are erased. But marine life, which was created on Day Five, remains. This does not fully resolve the question of the birds, who were also created on Day Five, but it suggests that *dagim* function as a thread of continuity, a living remnant of the original world that persists even as everything else is washed away.

This opens a speculative question. Does this detail shed light on the world we observe? Marine biology is markedly different from terrestrial biology. The variety of marine species is vast.

Is it possible that marine life appears so varied because it did not undergo the rupture of the *Mabul*? Perhaps the ocean preserves a greater continuity with pre-*Mabul* nature than the world on land.

If land animals were rebuilt from a narrow base, from the pairs entering the *teivah*, their descendants would reflect that limitation. Marine life did not pass through that same bottleneck. It did not enter the *teivah*; it remained outside the cycle of destruction and reconstruction. Oceanic life may therefore preserve a broader echo of earlier creation, one that is more continuous and more diverse.

This small Rashi opens multiple dimensions. It teaches a moral lesson about precise divine justice, a theological model of creation being reversed, and a lens through

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which to think about the natural world: how traces of an earlier order may still exist beneath the surface of the seas.

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וַיִּשָּׂא אֶךְ נֹחַ וְאִשְׁרֵה אֲתוֹ בַּתְּבֵּהָ (ז"כ:ג)

Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark....

רש"י: "אך נח" - לְבַד נח, זֶהוּ פְּשׁוּטוֹ; וּמִדֶּרֶשׁ אַגְדָּה: גִּוְנֵה וְכוּהָה דָם מִטְרַח הֶבְהֵמוֹת וְהַחִיּוֹת. וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים שְׂאֵחַר מְזֻנוֹת לֶאֱרִי וְהַכִּישׁוּ, וְעָלְיוּ נֶאֱמַר הֵן צָדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ שָׁלֵם (משלי יא:לא).

"Only Noah." – Noah alone. This is its literal meaning. But the Midrashic explanation is (Midrash Tanchuma, Noah 9) that he was coughing and spitting blood because of the trouble he had with the cattle and beasts; others say that he was once late in bringing food to a lion, so it struck him. Regarding him may the words be applied (Mishlei 11:31), "Behold, even the righteous is paid (for his evil deeds) in this world."

As the *Mabul* is coming to an end, the Torah writes: "*Vayisha'er ach Noah*" – "Only Noah survived." The word *ach* is strange. We already know that Noah was the lone survivor, so what is the Torah adding? Rashi explains that *ach* means "even." He was the sole survivor, yet he himself

had barely survived.

Why did Noah just barely survive?

Rashi offers several explanations. We won't go through all of them, but the most familiar is that Noah was injured by the lion of the *teivah*. He failed to feed the lion on time, and the lion attacked him. At first glance, this seems like a straightforward lesson about sensitivity to animals and to all of Hashem's creatures. Noah is entrusted with the entire natural world, and even a temporary lapse in care matters.

Once Noah leaves the *teivah*, a hierarchy is established. Human beings stand at the top of creation. We are meant to harness and guide nature responsibly. Judaism is not opposed to using animals to improve human welfare, even via experimentation, so long as it is done with care and restraint. Cruelty, brutality, and indifference are forbidden.

But there is something far more unsettling here.

Why should Noah be punished for insensitivity to a single lion? His entire year was devoted to preserving the natural world. Day and night, month after month, he fed and sustained countless creatures. Why should he be punished for one lapse, one moment of delay?

The answer is that sensitivity is not cumulative. You do not earn credits that allow you to be insensitive later. You cannot justify a local failure by pointing to a broader devotion. Even if Noah was saving the world, that lion still needed to be fed. In that moment, Noah fell short. Sensitivity operates in real time.

People make this mistake constantly. They are deeply committed in general, generous in broad strokes, and devoted to many people, but then are insensitive

to one person in one moment. When it is pointed out, the response is immediate. Don't you see how much I do? Don't you see how dedicated I am? All of that may be true, but it does not excuse the lapse.

Sometimes this happens even within a single relationship. Anyone who is married recognizes this dynamic. A person can work hard all day, support the household, prepare for Shabbos, and still be insensitive in a particular moment. The response is the same. How can you say I'm insensitive? Look at everything I do!

Relationships depend upon general commitment as well as moment-by-moment attentiveness. When you err in that moment, you do not justify it. You apologize, and you try again. Noah does not receive a free pass because of his heroic year. In that instant, he still owed care to the lion. For that lapse, he was injured.

Since October 7, 2023, responsibility has weighed heavily on many people. Lives have been rearranged, homes opened, routines broken, energy spent without pause. It is hard not to feel that this should earn some allowance. The Torah does not speak that way. Especially when a world is being rebuilt, responsibility sharpens. Noah rebuilt the world, and he still received no free pass.

THE CRY FROM THE TEIVAH

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל הַחַיָּה וְאֶת כָּל
הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּיבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹקִים רוּחַ עַל
הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשָּׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם: (ח:א)

*God remembered Noah and all the
beasts and all the cattle that were with
him in the ark, and God caused a wind
to pass over the earth, and the waters
subsided.*

רש"י: "וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים" - זֶה הַשֵּׁם מֵדַת הַדִּין
הוא, וְנִהְפְּכָה לְמֵדַת רַחֲמִים עַל יְדֵי תַפְלַת
הַצַּדִּיקִים; וְרָשָׁעֵתוֹן שֶׁל רָשָׁעִים הוֹפְכֶת מֵדַת
רַחֲמִים לְמֵדַת הַדִּין.

"God remembered" – This name signifies middas hadin, but it was transformed into middas harachamim through the prayers of the righteous, while the wicked can reverse mercy into judgment.

Rashi pauses on a single word. The name *Elokim* generally reflects *middas hadin*. It appears in contexts of judgment and punishment. And yet here, at the moment of relief, the Torah still uses the name *Elokim*.

Rashi explains that something has shifted. *Middas hadin* has been transformed into *middas harachamim* through *tefillah*. Judgment itself has been redirected.

This idea is far-reaching. *Tefillah* can alter outcomes. Hashem created a world in which human prayer can reshape how events unfold.

But that raises a question. Who is davening here?

The only person in the *teivah* capable of *tefillah* is Noah. Yet the Torah never records a *tefillah*. There is no explicit moment of prayer – no dialogue, no words. Still, Rashi reads *tefillah* into the *pasuk*. If God as *Elokim* has become *Rachem*, someone must have cried out to Him.

This suggests that Noah did daven, even if the Torah does not record it. The silence of the text does not mean the silence of the person.

This carries two implications.

First, *tefillah* predates Avraham and the emergence of the Jewish people. It belongs to humanity. Noah precedes the Jewish

nation. "*Ki beisi beis tefillah yikarei lechol ha'amim*" – "For My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Yeshayahu 56:7). There is something deeply human about reaching beyond oneself and calling out to God.

Second, *tefillah* does not require a perfect person. Noah is not Avraham. His spiritual life is not expansive, not outward-facing. Soon after leaving the *teivah*, he will falter. Yet his *tefillah* is effective.

This also broadens how we understand *tefillah*. Prayer can possess real power even when the person davening is spiritually incomplete. When a person feels a need and turns to Hashem, that movement itself has power.

Part of Noah's limitation was revealed earlier. He did not daven for others. He did not pray for his generation. Now, inside the *teivah*, he turns to Hashem for himself. Even that is enough to shift *middas hadin* into *middas harachamim*.

We often try to deepen our *tefillah*, to make it more thoughtful, more structured, and more meaningful. That effort matters. This Rashi reminds us of something more basic. When a human being truly needs Hashem and calls out, that call is heard. And sometimes that is enough to change everything. ■



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