

Delving into the depth of the *Zohar* :
The three colors of the rainbow
represent the three fathers of Klal Yisroel

In this week's *parashah* we learn that after the flood, Hashem changed the nature of the world. At first, He swore to Noach that He would never again destroy mankind. The events leading up to this are written in the Torah as follows:

"ויבן נח מזבח לה' ויקח מכל הבהמה הטהורה ומכל העוף הטהור ויעל עולות במזבח, וירח ה' את ריח הניחות, ויאמר ה' אל לבו לא אוסיף לקלל עוד את האדמה בעבור האדם, כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו, ולא אוסיף עוד להכות את כל חי כאשר עשיתי". ופירש רש"י: "לא אוסיף, ולא אוסיף, ככל הדבר לשבועה, הוא שכתוב (ישעיה נד-ט) אשר נשבעתי מעבור מי נח, ולא מצינו בה שבועה אלא זו שכפל דבריו והיא שבועה".

"Then Noach built an alter to Hashem and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the alter. Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma and Hashem said in His heart 'and I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man since the imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth, nor will I again continue to smite every living being as I have done.'"

Not only did Hashem "swear," but He then confirmed His words as a covenant with Noach by bringing forth a rainbow as "proof." The Torah elaborates on this as follows:

"ויאמר אלקים אל נח ואל בניו אתו לאמר, ואני הנני מקים את בריתי אתכם ואת זרעכם אחריכם... ולא יכרת כל בשר עוד ממני המבול, ולא יהיה עוד מבול לשחת הארץ... את קשתי נתתי בענן והיתה לאות ברית ביני ובין הארץ, והיה בענני ענן על הארץ ונראתה הקשת בענן. וזכרתי את בריתי אשר ביני וביניכם... ולא יהיה עוד המים למבול לשחת כל בשר, והיתה הקשת בענן וראיתיה לזכור ברית עולם".

"And G-d said to Noach and to his sons with him, saying, 'And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your children after you ... never again shall mankind be destroyed by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth ... I have sent My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth and it shall happen when I place a cloud over the earth and the bow will be seen in

the cloud and I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living being among the flesh ... and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.'"

We must explain what changed! Before the flood, Noach is described as a true *tzaddik*, and yet we know that his personal righteousness was not enough to prevent the flood. So what was so great about his animal sacrifices that Hashem was now ready to promise never to bring another flood upon mankind?

Additionally, the commentators question the idea that the rainbow was created only after the flood, being that there is a natural scientific explanation as to why and when a rainbow appears, as the Ramban says:

"ואנחנו על כרחינו נאמין לדברי היוונים, שמלהט השמש באויר הלך יהיה הקשת בתולדה, כי בכלי מים לפני השמש יראה כמראה הקשת".

"We should believe the words of the Greeks, that when the glow of the sun goes through a damp atmosphere the result would be a rainbow, just as a cup of water in the sun produces a rainbow."

Furthermore, the Ramban writes about the connection between the rainbow and *mitzvas milah*, which was given to Avraham and his descendants:

"תדע כי פירוש הכתוב כן, את קשתי שהיא מדת הדין הנתונה בענן בעת הדין תהיה לאות ברית, והיה בענני ענן על הארץ, שלא יאר ה' פניו אליה מחטאות יושביה, ונראתה מדת הדין שלי בענן, ואזכור את הברית בזכר הרחמים, ואחמול על הטף אשר בארץ, והנה האות הזה והברית הוא אות המילה והברית שבה, ולשון המקראות נאות מאד לענין".

"The attribute of justice is placed within the clouds during the time when Hashem is judging strictly. These clouds block the countenance of Hashem from the sinners of the world. As He remembers the covenant and His attribute of mercy, He has pity on the children of the

world. The rainbow that appears through the clouds represent the real covenant. The sign and covenant is the *milah* and its covenant. The *peasukim* are beautifully understood in this way.”

To elaborate on the Ramban’s words, we can look at the words of *המאיר לארץ ולדרימים* ברכת יוצר אור in the morning *davening*: “עליה ברחמים” which means that Hashem lights the world and its inhabitants with His attribute of mercy. But when mankind sins, the dark clouds fill the sky and become a barrier through which the sunlight\rays of mercy cannot reach the earth.

Now the words of Hashem in the Torah in regard to the rainbow are clearer: “את קשתי נתתי בענן והיתה לאות ברית ביני ובין הארץ” – “I have sent My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.” Then Hashem adds, “והיה” “בענני ענן על הארץ” – “and it shall happen when I place a cloud over the earth”; meaning, when the attribute of justice is creating a barrier, then “ונראתה הקשת בענן” – “the rainbow will be seen in the cloud,” meaning the rainbow will appear; and the power of *mitzvas milah* (as per the words of the Ramban) will chase away the “clouds”; i.e., their judgment of *din*, to allow the sun and mercy to return.

The sign of the rainbow is for *mitzvas milah*, which maintains the survival of the world

With this connection, we can also better appreciate the words of the Gemara (*Nedarim* 32): “גדולה מילה שאילמלא מילה (נדרים לב) לא נתקיימו שמים וארץ, שנאמר (ירמיה לג-כה) אם לא בריתי יומם וליילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמת” – *mitzvas milah* is so great that the world exists through it.

The world survives through the mitzvah of *milah*, which is represented by the rainbow, which keeps Hashem from destroying the world. Therefore, Hashem made a covenant specifically with the rainbow to symbolize His guarantee of the future survival of the world.

The Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:49) explains that *mitzvas milah* is there to help humans combat the desire for immorality, which led to the downfall of the generation of the flood, as it says in *Parashas Noach* (ו-יב):

“וירא אלקים את הארץ והנה נשחתה כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו” – “and Hashem saw the destructive ways of the people and He was forced to destroy the world.” But after the flood, when Hashem swore there would be no more floods, He also gave us *mitzvas milah* to help us in our battle; in other words, to ensure that there would be no *need* for a flood.

Ten generations from Noach to Avraham

With this idea we can explain the *Mishnah* in *Avos* (5:2):

“עשרה דורות מאדם ועד נח, להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין לפניו עד שהביא עליהן את מי המבול. עשרה דורות מנח ועד אברהם, להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין לפניו, עד שבא אברהם אבינו וקיבל שכר כולם.”

“There were ten generations from Adam to Noach, which shows the greatness of Hashem’s mercy, for the people sinned for many years until He brought the flood upon them. There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham, which shows the greatness of Hashem’s mercy; then came Avraham, and received all of their credit.”

When the world was created there were two separate “sets” of people – the first were the ten generations from Adam till Noach, when the people sinned and resulted in the flood, and the next were the ten generations from Noach till Avraham, during which the people also sinned (but the world was not destroyed), and ended in Avraham receiving the “credit” that was due to them.

Why couldn’t Noach’s righteousness alone save his generation? Why did Hashem have to bring a flood that time?

The reason Noach couldn’t receive all the credit in the same way that Avraham was able to was because Noach was a “private” *tzaddik*, who did not go out and preach or try to reach the people. Avraham, on the other hand, did “spread the word,” as it says in (בראשית יב-ה) - “ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן” he made converts. Rashi explains that Avraham and Sarah brought people closer to Hashem. This helped to save the people for they recognized Hashem and His power.

Avraham specifically was given the commandment of *milah*, and not Noach. *Milah* is the covenant between Hashem and mankind, as it says in (בראשית יז-1) “והקימותי את בריתי ביני וביןך ובין זרעך” – “I will have a covenant between Me and you and between your children after you forever”; Avraham, who made people aware of Hashem, is perfect for this covenant.

Hashem punished the ten generations after Noach with a flood, but after the ten generations of Avraham He gave us *mitzvas milah*, because through that mitzvah and its power of weakening the destructive power of the *yetzer hara* there would be a protection against the sins that could lead to another flood. In this way,

Hashem was issuing a guarantee that there would be no cause for another flood to be brought. The very act of *milah* alone would protect us from it – as per the words of the Rambam.

Three colors for the three Avos

The *Zohar* (Pinchus 215) states that the three colors of the rainbow – white, red and green – are a symbol of the three forefathers: white represents Avraham, who is the symbol for kindness; red represents Yitzchak, who is the symbol of strength; and green represents Yaakov, who is the symbol of beauty. Hashem swore to protect the Jews because of the merit of these three men, as it says: **“ויקרא כו-מב): “וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב ואף (אלי-א-לי למה עזבתני” [תהלים כב-ב] Sefer Tehillim** – “את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכור והארץ אזכור” – “I will remember my covenant with Yaakov, Yitzchak and Avraham.”

When there seems to be an ominous judgment against the world, Hashem sends the rainbow, which consists of the colors represented by our three forefathers, with whom He made a covenant. (*Sefer Tehillim* [תהלים כב-ב] states **“My G-d, My G-d, why do You forsake me?”** The name for “My G-d” – **אלי-א-לי** – is an acronym for the colors of the rainbow: **אדום לבן ירוק (אלי-א-לי)**

The *mishnah* in *Avos* (פ”א מ”ב) states: **“על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים”** – “On three things the world stands – on the Torah, service, and acts of kindness.

The *Zohar* (*Vayetzei* 146) explains that our three forefathers represent these three things as well: Yaakov is Torah; Yitzchak is service; and Avraham is kindness. We already know that the rainbow was specifically chosen as the symbol of Hashem’s oath to keep the world from being destroyed, and that too (with its three colors) is because it is a symbol of our three Avos. There is a clear correlation between our forefathers and the promise of Hashem to keep the world intact. (It should be noted that when we speak about Hashem being “reminded,” the actual meaning is that we are countering the claims of the prosecutors against Klal Yisrael).

Three evil forces vs. the three pillars of the world

Now we can carefully attempt to tie in this concept with what the *Derech Pikudecha* brings in the name of the *mekubalim* about *mitzvas milah*, that the flesh of the foreskin we circumcise contains three layers of skin, which symbolize the three *klipos* – negative forces: **שערה, ענן גדול, אש מתלקחת**, which are mentioned in the vision of the prophet Yechezkel (1-4): **“וארא והנה רוח סערה באה מן הצפון ענן גדול ואש מתלקחת”** – “And I saw a tempest coming from the north, a huge cloud, and fire.”

Let us explain what these three negative forces represent. Shlomo Hamelech taught us that the world was set up with equilibrium: **“זה לעומת זה עשה האלקים”** (קהלת ז-ד): In other words, the positive side of the world counteracts the negative. The world stands on the three positive forces of Torah, service, and kindness, and opposing these three forces are three equally negative ones mentioned there in Yichezkel.

Hashem gave to Avraham the mitzvah of *milah* because he was the first of the three forefathers, and with this covenant the world would be able to stand strong against the three negative forces. The purpose of *milah* itself is in order to remove these forces from our lives, which then enables us to pursue greater achievement in the three areas upon which the world stands – on the Torah, service, and acts of kindness.

To summarize all that we have just learned, we now have the covenant of the rainbow, which is there to help save the world, a rainbow the *Zohar* says has three colors because it represents the three fathers who each embody one of the three pillars upon which the world stands: Torah, service, and acts of kindness. We also know from the Ramban that the rainbow is connected to the mitzvah of *milah*, which was given to us in order that we have the power to rid ourselves of the three negative forces in order to help the world remain standing upon its three positive forces – Torah, service, and acts of kindness. The Gemara in *Nedarim* tells us about the greatness of *milah*, for through it the world remains whole. Now we see that this is because *milah* helps us pursue the three positive forces.

The direction in which the rainbow points

Earlier, we raised a question from the Ramban about the rainbow being a natural phenomenon. Now we will explain how the rainbow can be both a natural phenomenon and a sign from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The Ramban himself (as well as Rabbeinu Bachya) adds that the sign of a *true* rainbow is that the bow points upward toward the sky, and not toward the earth, as we are accustomed to seeing. The reason for this is that a rainbow pointing toward earth makes it appear as if the arrows are headed in the direction of mankind; when facing the other way, it is as if Hashem is saying that He is not targeting us.

True, the concept of a rainbow is a natural one, but the direction it must face is not. The special covenant created after the flood includes the condition that it now faces heavenward.

Now we can understand why Hashem showed Noah a rainbow before He made the covenant, as it says **“ויאמר”** (ט-יב):

אלקים אל נח זאת אות הברית אשר הקימותי ביני ובין כל בשר אשר על
 "זאת אות הברית, הראהו הקשת ואמר upon which rashi says "זאת אות הברית"
 "He [Hashem] showed the rainbow to him – לו הרי האות שאמרתי"
 [Noach] and said 'this is the sign.' "

The end of mankind is the angel of death

The *passuk* states (בראשית ו-יג): "ויאמר אלקים לנח קץ כל בשר אשר על הארץ כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם את הארץ"
 "Hashem said to Noach, 'The end of mankind has arrived, for are filled with evil; I am about to destroy them from earth.'" The *Zohar*
 explains that the Angel of Death came to prosecute the world and bring darkness upon it, as it says: "קץ שם לחושך".
 His claim was that the world was set up with a justice system, as it states (משלי כט-ד): "מלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ", and when the people sinned, they deserved to be destroyed.

Better the arrow enter me and not in my children

To add some flavor to our discussion, we will include the words in *Parashas Yisro*: (שמות יט-ד): "אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים which Rashi explains as "הנשר הזה אינו מתיירא אלא מן האדם, שמא יזרוק בו חץ לפי שאין עוף פורח על גביו, לכך נותנו על כנפיו אומר, מוטב יכנס החץ בי ולא בבני, אף אני עשיתי כן (שמות יד-יט) ויסע מלאך האלקים וגו' ויבא בין מחנה מצרים וגו', והיו מצרים זורקים חצים ואבני בליסטראות והענן מקבלם."

"The eagle is different from the other birds for it is only afraid of man – that man will shoot at it, for no bird soars higher than the eagle, and therefore he places his young on top of him when he flies and says 'Better the arrow enter me and not in my children.' So too, says Hashem [when the Egyptians attacked Bnei Yisrael] shall the clouds come between the Egyptians and the Jews, so that the arrows and spears that were being thrown were caught in them [by Hashem]."

The Maggid of Kozhnitz, who wonders how they were able to throw at Hashem, explains:

"אלא הענין הוא כך, כי בשעת יציאת מצרים וקריעת ים סוף, וכן בכל זמן כשמגדיל הבורא ברוך הוא חסדיו על עמו ישראל רוצה המקטרג לקלקל, כמו שאיתא שאמר השר הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה, ומדוע אתה ברוך הוא נושא פנים להם. וזה הקטרוג נקרא חצים, שמורה [גם על קטרוג] בלשון, כמו שכתוב (ירמיה ט-ז) חץ שחוט לשונם וכיוצא בהם."

ואף על פי כן הקב"ה מגדיל חסדו, ודן את דינו ומוציא משפטינו לאורה ומסיר כל המקטרגים וסותם פיהם. וזה שכינה הכתוב, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, ואומר מוטב יכנס החץ בי, שהקב"ה מסיר הקטרוג מעל עמו ישראל ולא יכנס בהם החץ, ומקבל על עצמו כביכול להשיבם תשובה ניצחת ולהסיר כל תלונה."

The interpretation of the above statement is that when Hashem is compassionate towards us, the prosecuting angels try to prevent Him from being so by finding fault in our actions, but Hashem quiets them and carries and protects us by taking all of the arrows thrown by our prosecutors.

But after the flood, Hashem decided to never let that type of destruction occur again, through the help of the mitzvah of *milah* and our three forefathers, who are represented by the rainbow's three colors. He made the covenant of the rainbow with mankind and informed Noach that when a true rainbow will appear, it will be a hint to the world that we are actually deserving of being destroyed; but they can then look to the sky and see that the rainbow faces upward and not down, which is as if to say, "Better the arrow enter Me and not in my children."

Sacrifices in the merit of our forefathers

Now we can similarly appreciate the awesome power of the animal sacrifices that Noach brought. We learn in *Parashas Pinchas* that the three types of animals allowed for communal sacrifices are also symbols of our three forefathers. Rashi says in the name of Reb Moshe Hadarshan (במדבר כח-יט): "פרים כנגד אברהם שנאמר (בראשית יח-ז) ואל הבקר רץ אברהם. איל כנגד אילו של יצחק. כבשים The bull represents Avraham, the ram Yitzchak and the lamb Yaakov."

When Noach brought these sacrifices he caused Hashem to "smell" the beauty, "וירח ה' את ריח הניחוח", The smell was a reminder that Bnei Yisrael would bring sacrifices in the merit of Avos to attain forgiveness for themselves. Noach's intent was proven correct: immediately upon Hashem's receiving the sacrifices, He swore to never again attempt to destroy the world, and added to His promise the covenant of the rainbow as a reminder of the three Avos, through whom we will continuously be forgiven, and thus the world would never again be in the position of deserving the punishment of a flood.

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