

The Best Remedy

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“And Noach began to farm the land (lit. And Noach the farmer began by) planting a vineyard. He drank from the wine and became drunk and uncovered within his tent”

(BreiBAD WORD REMOVED 9:20-21)

Noach the Farmer

The Torah describes what Noach did when he left the Ark. After the great Flood had washed away all life, Noach began to settle down and planted a vineyard, getting drunk in the process.

Rashi compares the word בָּעֵץ (“*Vayacha*” – and Noach **began**) with the word חֻלִּין (“*Chulin*” – **mundane**). Noach began his descent to the level of mundane by embarking on a mundane endeavor. The Torah finds fault with Noach’s preoccupation of the mundane – displayed in his planting a vine and drinking himself into a stupor.

We need to understand what brought Noach, the complete and righteous tzaddik as described in the beginning of the parashah, to drink wine upon exiting the Ark. Perhaps this can also help us to see the struggle we face daily, for what it really is.

If we think about the Torah’s description of life in the Ark, especially in light of words of Chazal, we see how difficult it was for Noach. His catering to the needs of the animals gave him no rest. Every animal had their specific food which had to be given at a specific time. And when Noach was delayed, the animals did not take it sitting down. The Midrash (Tanchuma Noach, 9) describes how the lion struck Noach for not bringing him his food on time. Perhaps even harder on Noach was his time and energy now being relegated for animal provision and beastly preservation.

When one goes through a difficult time, or has some serious situation to contend with, there is usually a certain amount of soul-searching done. It is important to examine where one is holding and why he is going through such difficulty. All events have their spiritual source and primary causes. Thus they require self-scrutiny to determine the root of their occurrence and see what must be done to rectify the situation.

When Noach left the ark, however, he did not dedicate himself to this goal, nor did he try to rectify the sins which caused the Flood. Perhaps he needed to de-stress after all of the tension and hardship that he had endured that past year. He planted a vineyard and drank wine instead.

He lowered his standards and became ‘Noach the farmer’ instead of ‘Noach the righteous’. This is why the Torah refers to his preoccupation as mundane. Noach ‘began’ by using the ‘mundane’ way to deal with, and acclimatize himself to, his situation, instead of absorbing his attention on spiritual causes or greater accomplishments.

Our Partnership with Satan

With this we can understand the conversation that Noach had with the Satan (the Angel of evil, the Yetzer Harah).

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, BreiBAD WORD REMOVED 8) says that Satan came to Noach and offered his help. Would you like me to be your partner, he asked Noach, and help you plant a vineyard?

Noach said yes.

Satan immediately brought a sheep and slaughtered it, watering the vine with its blood. He then proceeded to slaughter a lion, and then again a pig, drenching the tender seedling with their life's blood. And this is how the first grapevine grew.

Why did Satan do this?

This is actually a metaphor of what happens to a person who drinks wine. With the first cup, he becomes like a sheep, amenable and unassuming. After the second cup he begins to speak arrogantly, with the strength of a lion. After the third or fourth cup he becomes like a pig, wallowing in filth and even wetting himself.

There are several questions on this Midrash.

- One, since when does Satan seek to become our partner and give us advice?
- Second, why did Noach agree to Satan's proposition?
- And third, why didn't Noach protest over the actions of Satan and prevent him from watering the vine with the slaughter of the animals?

The truth is that Satan is a very sly and scheming character. He often presents us with his council and lures us with temptation. He is constantly testing our weaknesses.

And yet, this is often done within the confines of our own hearts. When considering an action, one can be fooled by the 'masked' Angel at work, not realizing that it is the guile of the Satan, in the guise of our feelings and thoughts on the matter, which is urging us on.

After succeeding in causing us to sin, he takes us to court. In the next world, he uncovers his double-faced identity by acting as our prosecutor and testifying against us. He even initiates the proceedings by asking us; why did you listen to my advice and sin instead of doing what you were supposed to?

Perhaps we can now understand Noach's actions.

Noach looked for a way to alleviate the depth of pain that he had from the ordeal of the Flood. His thoughts turned to the tranquillizing properties of wine and his feelings generated desire, fueled by Satan's devious incitement. This was the partnership the Midrash refers to.

Noach accepted his partnership, thus beginning his tenure as a 'mundane farmer'. While

tending to the vine, he consented and then consorted with his evil inclination every step of the way.

Our job is to recognize the deception of the Yetzer Hara and disassociate ourselves from his collaboration. We shouldn't take the 'mundane' way out to deal with our situations, fooling ourselves with the stupor of materialistic preoccupation.

We should absorb our attention on spiritual pursuits and preoccupy ourselves with Torah accomplishments instead. By strengthening our resolve and dedicating ourselves to Torah and Mitzvot, we have the best remedy for the trials and tribulations of life.

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