

PARSHAS NOACH · TORAH OR

מים רבים

Mayim Rabim

*"Many waters cannot extinguish the love, and rivers
cannot wash it away."*



PART A

Worries about the World Cannot
Extinguish Your Love for
Hashem!

PART B

The Flood Was Not Only
Destruction: It Was Purification

A TEACHING FROM

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PART A

Worries about the World Cannot Extinguish Your Love for Hashem!

1

Shir HaShirim says:

"Mayim rabim lo yuchlu lechabos es ha'ahavah, v'hanaharos lo yishtifuha"

"Many waters cannot extinguish the love, and rivers cannot wash it away."

The Alter Rebbe explains that the **"mayim rabim," the raging waters**, represent the worries and pressures of physical life. A person has to earn a living, build a career, support himself, and deal with all of the responsibilities and concerns that come with living in the physical world. Our minds can become filled with questions about money, work, success, and the many practical issues that demand our attention.

At times, these worries can feel like floodwaters. They can surround a person and occupy so much of his mind that there seems to be little room left for spirituality.

Yet the possuk tells us that these waters **cannot extinguish the love**.

2

Every Jew possesses an intrinsic love for Hashem. This love is not simply something that a person learns or develops. It comes from the very essence of the Jewish soul.

The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya, Perek 2:

"ונפש השנית בישראל היא חלק אלוהה ממעל ממש"

"The second soul of a Jew is literally a part of G-d above."

At the core of every Jew is a G-dly soul, a *neshamah*, whose very nature is to be connected to Hashem.

Tanya gives us a powerful image to understand this. In Perek 19, the Alter Rebbe compares the soul to the flame of a candle. A flame naturally rises upward. No one has to teach a flame to rise; it is simply its nature. The flame constantly strains upward toward its source.

The same is true of the *neshamah*. Its natural desire is to rise above the limitations of the physical world and connect with Hashem. Deep within every Jew is a desire for holiness, for Torah, for mitzvos, and for closeness to Hashem.

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Before the soul comes down into this world and enters the body, it exists in a completely spiritual state. The Alter Rebbe describes the soul as “נהנית מזיו השכינה” — enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence. It experiences closeness to Hashem without all of the distractions of physical life.

Then the soul comes down into a body. Now everything changes. The person has to eat, sleep, work, earn money, and function within a physical world. Instead of being surrounded by open spirituality, the soul finds itself dealing with material concerns and everyday responsibilities.

Nevertheless, **the soul never loses its essential nature**. Even after entering the physical world, the *neshamah* still possesses the same inner desire to connect with Hashem. The surroundings have changed, but the essence of the soul has not.

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This is the first meaning of “**Mayim rabim lo yuchlu lechabos es ha’ahavah.**” No matter how deeply involved a Jew may become in the physical world, the love can never truly be extinguished. A person may feel distant. He may be distracted. He may not always feel inspired. He may even go through times when his connection to Torah and mitzvos is barely visible.

But somewhere deep inside, **the connection remains**. The *neshamah* still wants Hashem. It still wants to do a mitzvah. It still wants to connect.

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There is an even bigger message! The purpose of the soul’s descent into the physical world is not merely that it should survive the experience unchanged. The goal is much greater than that.

The very physical world that appears to pull the soul downward can ultimately bring the soul higher.

The worries, challenges, distractions, and struggles of physical life do not merely fail to extinguish the soul’s love for Hashem. When a person works through those challenges and chooses to connect to Hashem despite them, the soul reaches a level that it could not have reached before coming into this world.

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Before coming down, the soul was already close to Hashem. But that closeness came naturally. There was little standing in its way.

In this world, however, the soul has to choose Hashem while surrounded by competing pressures. A person has to find G-dliness while dealing with work, money, responsibilities, and the distractions of everyday life. **That struggle creates something new.** The descent into the physical world becomes the cause of **an even greater ascent!**

The message, therefore, is not simply that physicality cannot destroy a Jew's connection to Hashem. The deeper message is that physical life itself can become the means through which a person reaches an even deeper and stronger connection.

*The raging waters cannot extinguish the love.
Ultimately, they can help reveal just how deep that love really is.*

PART B

The Flood Was Not Only Destruction: It Was Purification

1

Before the Flood, the world had fallen into a state of deep corruption. At the end of Parshas Bereishis, the Torah says:

”וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ”

“Hashem saw that the wickedness of man had become great upon the earth.”

Source: Bereishis 6:5 (the end of Parshas Bereishis).

Then, at the beginning of Parshas Noach, the Torah describes the situation even more strongly:

”ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס”

“The earth had become corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence and robbery.”

Source: Bereishis 6:11 (the beginning of Parshas Noach). Rashi on this verse explains “corrupt” as immorality and idolatry, and “violence” (*chamas*) as robbery. See also 6:12–13.

The problem was not simply that a few individuals were behaving badly. The entire society had become corrupt. Dishonesty, immorality, stealing, and other forms of wrongdoing had become part of the way people lived. Hashem therefore decided that the world could not continue in that state.

2

But this raises an important question. If the purpose of the Flood was simply to punish the wicked people and remove them from the world, why was a flood necessary? Hashem could have brought an end to that generation in many other ways. If the goal was only destruction, there would seemingly have been no need for such a long and dramatic process.

The Flood itself did not happen in a moment. The Torah tells us that the rain fell for forty days and forty nights (Bereishis 7:4, 7:12, 7:17). The waters then remained upon the earth, slowly receded, and Noah and his family remained inside the *teivah* until the earth was completely dry. From the beginning of the Flood until Noah finally left the ark was approximately an entire year (Noah entered the *teivah* on the 17th of the second month of his 600th year, Bereishis 7:11, and left on the 27th of the second month of the following year, 8:14–16; on the difference between a lunar and a solar year here, see Rashi on 8:14, citing Bereishis Rabbah 33:17). Why was such a long process necessary?

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The answer is that the waters of the Flood were not only waters of destruction. **They were also waters of purification.** The world had become spiritually contaminated. The corruption had become so deep that the world itself needed to be cleansed and renewed. The *Mabul* was not simply removing the people who had sinned. It was purifying the world and preparing it for a new beginning.

This helps us understand why the Torah emphasizes that the rain fell for forty days and forty nights. The number forty is strongly connected with purification. A kosher *mikvah* must contain forty *se'ah* of water (Mishnah Mikvaos 1:7; Talmud Bavli, Yoma 31a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 201:1). When a person requires purification, he immerses completely in the waters of the *mikvah* and emerges in a new state. The forty days of the Flood therefore parallel the forty *se'ah* of a *mikvah*. In a sense, the entire world was being immersed in a giant *mikvah* (see "A Taste of Text: Parshat Noach" ("How to Waterproof Your Life"), chabad.org/1583409, and Bilvavi, Weekly Shmuess 006, "Noach: Purity of Mikveh," bilvavi.net).

The same waters that appeared to be destroying the world were actually cleansing it.

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This completely changes the way we understand the Flood. On the surface, the waters represented chaos and destruction. Everything familiar was being washed away. But on a deeper level, the Flood was bringing the world back to a state of purity and harmony. The world needed to begin again. The corruption of the previous generation had to be washed away so that a new world could emerge.

This is also why the waters are later referred to as "**Mei Noach**," "the waters of Noach" (Yeshayahu 54:9: "כי מי נח זאת לי," "For this is like the waters of Noach to Me"). The name Noach is connected with the idea of *menuchah*: rest, calm, and tranquility (the name Noach comes from the root *nuach*, "rest"; at Bereishis 5:29 Lemech names him with a play on *yenachameinu*, "will comfort us," and Rashi there explains that the earth was "comforted" in his days; the root of "rest" itself appears at 8:4, *vatanach*, and 8:9, *manoach*). At first glance, it seems strange to associate the violent waters of the Flood with tranquility. The Flood looked like the opposite of peace. But that is exactly the point.

Sometimes the process of purification does not feel peaceful while it is happening. The waters may feel overwhelming. Something may appear to be breaking down. A person may feel that his entire world is being turned upside down. Yet the purpose of that process may be to remove something that does not belong and to make room for something higher.

The Flood teaches us that not every difficulty is simply destruction. Sometimes the very experience that seems to be tearing something down is actually cleansing it, refining it, and preparing it for a new beginning. The waters of the *Mabul* destroyed a corrupted world, but they also purified the world.

What looked like an ending was also the beginning of something new.