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## פרשת נח

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### פרק ח פסוק כא

כא וַיֵּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רִיחַ הַנְּחִיחַם וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־לִבּוֹ לֹא אֶסַּף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבוּר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְעֻרָיו וְלֹא־אֶסַּף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי:

### רש"י

מִנְעֻרָיו. 'מִנְעֻרָיו' כְּתִיב, מִשְׁנֵנֶנֶר לְצֵאת מִמְעֵי אִמּוֹ נִתֵּן בּוֹ יֵצֵר הָרַע:

### מושג

מִשְׁנֵנֶנֶר לְצֵאת מִמְעֵי אִמּוֹ נִתֵּן בּוֹ יֵצֵר הָרַע:

### Translation:

From the time he moves to exit his mother's womb the יצר הרע is placed in him.

### Explanation:

Each good action we take creates within us a positive moral force which is termed the יצר הטוב, literally that which has been formed by good. Evil, conversely, acts create a יצר הרע. Even acts done as children, although not truly intentional or calculated, impact our moral character, as does the environment in which we live. Thus our Musag teaches us that from birth our moral character begins to be formed, affected by all that we do, see and hear. This fact was particularly damaging to the generation of the flood, as they did not benefit from the changes in nature that serve to remind us that we too have the ability to begin anew. However, our Pasuk and the following Pasuk teach us that nature would now undergo seasonal and even daily changes inspiring man to shake off – לנער – bad habits and renew himself. Hashem, by making these changes in the natural order, thus ensures that man will never again fall into a state of total evil from which he can no longer be redeemed.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

The difficulty in our Pasuk is both textual and logical. If we are to understand that Hashem promises to no longer destroy the world because man is inherently evil from birth, this reason – כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו – should be placed at the end of the Pasuk, not sandwiched in the middle of the Pasuk between Hashem's promise not to destroy the world. Logically we struggle to understand why Hashem should first destroy the world because of the יצר הרע, and then change His mind and pledge to never destroy the world because of the very same reason! Also puzzling is the relevance of the following Pasuk which talks about the seasons.

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## NOTES

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It is difficult to understand the middle of the Pasuk which seems to give a reason why Hashem will no longer curse the land or punish all living things. The Pasuk says *כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו*, which might be translated as ‘the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’. This is difficult to understand for this should be the very reason that man should be punished. In fact, above we read that this was why the flood was brought:

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרְץ וְכָל-יֵצֶר מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם (פרק ו פסוק ה).

Further, why would Hashem change his mode of punishment? If Hashem felt that the evil committed by the people before the flood resulted in the need to eliminate them, why should this change after the flood? Is Hashem saying that He was too harsh beforehand and now must ‘lighten-up’? It is clear that Hashem does not change, so what did change? In short, how could it be that the very reason for which Hashem brought the flood now be used as a justification not to bring another?

There is also a textual difficulty to explaining that Hashem is stating the reason nature is not to be punished. For if *יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו* was the reason and the focus of the Pasuk, then it should have been placed at the end of the Pasuk, not sandwiched in between Hashem’s promises not to destroy the world.

In order to explain we must first start by providing a clearer understanding of the very essence of the *יצר הרע*. We normally understand that the *יצר הרע* is an evil inclination within man that attempts to convince him to sin. The idea would be that Hashem placed this within man to challenge him. However, this is not true. If this were so, the correct term should be *יצר רע*, not *הרע*, and the usage of the word *יצר* would not be appropriate.

On the Pasuk *וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרְץ וְכָל-יֵצֶר מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם*: Rav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch explains clearly what the word *יצר* means, which causes a significant shift in the way we might understand the term *יצר הרע*. He writes:

It is unfortunate that this word is so often translated by “instinct, inclination, impulse”, as if there was a force in man that drives him to evil. From that here was then formed the hopeless view of life on which a great ‘religious’ society rests, that dogma of the power of evil in which Man is supposed to be born, and out of which he can only be saved by a certain belief. Out of this little word *יצר* accordingly a strong cord has been woven by which mankind is bound and gagged, and yet nothing is further from this idea than this very word.

Already in the root *יצר* there is absolutely nothing of forcing but rather of forming. But the form of the word *יצר* is not active at all, but passive, it does not mean ‘the former’, the one who forms, but that which is formed. *יצר* is clearly in relation to *יוצר* as the creation is to the creator: (ישעיהו כט:טז) *וַיֵּצֶר אֱמֹר לְיֵצְרוֹ (ישעיהו כט:טז)*, ‘And the created said to the creator’. *יצר* is accordingly like the material, *כחומר ביד היוצר*, subordinated to the *יוצר*, and is the creation, the formation of our thoughts.

Our soul is a *חושב*, a weaver, the material is given to it. As the raw material, all possibilities, good and bad, lie in its hand. The soul has to weave them together to form into shapes, *צורות*, i.e. our thoughts our ideas, and these *צורות* are our *יצר*, the formations of our weaving soul....

Thus David calls the the joy in devotion to God, the *שמחה להתנדב*, which the people showed in their gifts for the building of the Temple *העם*, and prays *שמרה* *יצר מחשבות לבב העם*, and prays *שמרה* i.e. “this joy of giving things up for holy purposes, preserve You for ever to be the formation of the thoughts of Your people.”

Rav Hirsch thus translates the Pasuk: *כל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום (בראשית ו:ה)* to mean: ‘Every formation of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all of the day.’ (He goes on to prove that the use of the words *יצר* *כל* in the Pasuk cannot possibly be understood as referring to an evil inclination, as the use of *כל* would be unintelligible.)

The term *יצר הרע* is thus understood as the evil that we have created by our negative actions and bad choices. Unfortunately those choices create a basis by which we weigh all future choices, much in the way that bad habits are incredibly powerful predictors of future behavior. Bad choices become bad moral habits and are hard to break. This is what *עבירה גוררת עבירה* mean when they say *עבירה גוררת עבירה*.

It is clear that while all choices somewhat impact our moral character, the more intentional the choice the more powerful and longer lasting the influence. Moral decisions that we make after careful deliberation create a very influential *יצר הרע*, a force that will weigh heavily into future decisions. On the other hand, decisions that are made without intelligent consideration will have a much weaker influence, providing the *יצר הרע* with a voice that may be easier to ignore in the future.

One of the challenges we face is that there are decisions we make or acts that we do without much thought that nevertheless do influence us. A perfect example are the decisions we make when we are young. Not much intelligent deliberation went into these decisions yet we carry the weight of their influence into adulthood. Bad moral habits are created almost mindlessly and we are left to fight the effect they have on us.

In addition, we must be cognizant of the fact that it is not only our decisions or actions that combine to fashion our *יצר*. Our environment, all the sounds, sights and scents, that bombard our senses are also both consciously and unconsciously incorporated by our minds into our moral selves and contribute to the makeup of our *יצר*. From the moment we are born, *משננער לצאת ממעי*, our *יצר* is being formed, well before the very first conscious act is taken. While the dominion they have over us is relatively minimal<sup>1</sup>, it is still a force to be reckoned with. How do we counter these pernicious influences?

The answer is renewal, the ability to change. Man must be convinced that yesterday's decisions, while influencing future actions, do not dictate nor predict tomorrow's decisions. It is for this reason that Hashem instructs the Jewish people as their very first commandment to set their lives by the cycles of the moon. Hashem had witnessed how evil had overtaken Pharaoh to the extent that he lost his ability to choose anything but evil, and realized that man needs an *אות*, a reminder to renew himself periodically. *החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים*, looking at the renewal of the moon should be the first of renewals for you<sup>2</sup>. Seeing the constant waxing and waning of the moon reminds man that every day is different than the one before, and just as nature is constantly changing so may he. We all feel this sentiment with the changing of seasons; they provide man with constant inspiration, urging him to renew himself as the world around him changes.

Perhaps we might now understand what doomed the generation of the flood. We have to wonder: How is it that they reached such a level of depravity that Hashem considered them beyond saving? When we look closely at the Pasuk which describes the reason for their demise we are shocked:

*וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יֵצֶר מַחֲשֵׁבֶת לְבוֹ רָק רָע כָּל-הַיּוֹם.*

How does one reach the level where *כל יצר*, every part of his *יצר*, was *רק רע*, only evil, *כל היום*, every part of the day? How could they become so totally consumed with evil that there was simply no redeeming feature that might save them?

The answer is that nature did them in. The Sforno<sup>3</sup> writes that before the flood there was no variation whatsoever in the path of the sun and no resulting change in temperature or season; it was

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason, explains Rav Hirsch, we call the period of youth *נעורים* from the Shoresh, which means to shake off. These early formations of the *יצר* can be shaken off, as they are not the result of deliberate, fully intelligent acts.

<sup>2</sup> This idea is discussed in depth in the Musag (פשרת בא) *כל המברך על הירח בזמנו*. I would strongly suggest reading that essay in order to fully appreciate what I write here.

<sup>3</sup> On Pasuk *כב* the Sforno writes:

always perfect weather outside. In addition, we know that man lived for hundreds of years, making even the cycle of life almost indiscernible. People saw no change around them whatsoever. For such people even the simple, somewhat unintentional, moral mistakes committed while young, or the impressions made upon them through exposure to their evil environment, became almost impossible to overcome. They did not conceptualize the factor of change, since they saw none around them. Thus even the impressions of נעורים became powerful forces that they were not able to overcome.

When G-d saw this, He did not change Himself, nor change man, rather He changed nature. This is what our Pasuk is telling us. Hashem says that the mistakes of youth will no longer damn mankind as they do to the generation of the flood. For even if<sup>4</sup> man is influenced by his behavior as a youth – כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו - something almost impossible to prevent, this will no longer lead to the destruction of the world<sup>5</sup>. For, as the following Pasuk teaches:

עַד כְּלַיְמֵי הָאָרֶץ זָרַע וְקָצִיר וְקָר וְחֹם וְיָרֵחַ וְיוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ:

In the post-flood world man will be surrounded by change. This in turn will help him overcome the mistakes of youth and provide him with constant reminders, and even inspire him, as to the possibility of beginning anew. Post-flood man will never be condemned to his יצר הרע, that which was created within him as the result of his past moral lapses, determining his future actions. Man will always have hope.

Thus the changes in nature, and even in man's life expectancy, were not an unfortunate consequence of the flood but rather a guided design change for the benefit of man and nature itself. They led to God being able to guarantee to Mankind that such a calamity will never be repeated.

### Questions for Further Thought:

- Does the above idea help explain why the Torah connects the הגים to the seasons of the year? And, if there is such a connection, why are ראש השנה and יום כפור not connected to any season?
- According to our understanding of life after the flood can you explain why God chose a rainbow to be the אות of the new ברית between man and God?<sup>6</sup>

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לא ישובתו מלהתמיד על אותו האופן בלתי טבעי שהגבלתי להם אחר המבול, וזה שילך השמש על גלגל נוטה מקו משוה היום, ובנטייתו היה סיבת השתנו כל אלה הזמנים. כי קודם המבול היה מהלך השמש תמיד בקו משוה היום, ובזה היה אז תמיד עת האביב, ובו היה תיקון כללי ליסודות וצמחים ולבעלי חיים ולאורך ימיהם. ואמר שיהיה זה כל ימי הארץ, עד אשר יתקן האל יתברך את הקלקול שנעשה בה במבול, כאמור הארץ החדשה אשר אני עושה (ישעיה סו:כב)

<sup>4</sup> We are thus understanding the word כי as meaning if, not because. This is consistent with the (ראש השנה ג.) which teaches: דהא, אלא, אי, דילמא, כי משמש בארבע לשונות: אי, דילמא, אלא, דהא; the word כי can be used to mean four things: if, perhaps, but and for.

<sup>5</sup> This may help us explain the seemingly redundant wording of the Pasuk in which Hashem promises twice not to destroy the world, once at the beginning of the Pasuk and again after saying כי יצר לב האדם רע. Hashem is saying that He will not destroy the world and even if the influences of youth will impact man, which in the past would have been a fatal flaw, still, Hashem says, I will not destroy nature.

<sup>6</sup> See Rav Hirsch who provides a beautiful explanation.