

## Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### *Parashat Noach* – The Dove and the Olive Leaf

The blessed rain has been falling and cleansed the land for us to happily begin our New Year routine on the freshly washed earth. As we enter *Parashat Noach* with the Sukkah decorations packed away, we inhale the moist scent of Cheshvan aroused by the after-rain. During this month, the world began anew after the flood had purified it from its *kelipah* (husk) of impurity and lust. Therefore, during the month of Cheshvan, which always is about the cleansing scent of renewal, I begin my new kind of writing for you, *Nature in the Parasha*. So many life-lessons can be gleaned from Nature. I hope to find a Nature description in each *parasha*, delve into its depth and share it with you.

#### Nature's Speech

Nature has messages for people. In the Torah, both trees and animals are described as talking. For example, the trees asked the olive tree to be king over them (*Shoftim* 9:8). The Talmud mentions that the raven spoke (*Sanhedrin* 108b), and in our *parasha* the dove told Noach a message. It is not necessarily that these animals and plants actually spoke, but rather that if they would be able to speak, they would have expressed the messages attributed to them. This also applies to *Perek Shira* (Nature's Song). It is also possible that the angels appointed over the plants and animals are the one that speak (*Pardes Yosef, Bereishit* 8:11). The popular proverb, "Actions speak louder than words," also applies to nature. By observing the happenings in Nature wisely, we may actually be able to understand their language and hear their messages for us. In the ark, Noach had developed a special relationship with the animals in his care. He had developed a sensitivity for their language and understood the message of the dove, as it states, "The dove came to him at the evening time, and in her mouth was an olive leaf torn off, so Noach knew that the waters had abated from off the earth" (*Bereishit* 8:11).

#### The Message of the Dove

Rashi explains that "in her mouth" means 'a word in her mouth' i.e. 'speaking.' The word *טרף/taraf*, which is translated 'torn' can also mean food, like in *Eishet Chail (Mishlei* 31:15). Why did the Torah specify which kind of leaf the dove brought to Noach? A leaf from any tree would be proof that the waters had abated. Yet, the olive leaf is bitter and the dove's message was to prefer the bitter over the sweet when we receive it from Hashem's hand. The dove said, "Rather that my food be bitter as an olive, but from the hand of G-d, than as sweet as honey but from the hand of mortal men" (*Babylonian Talmud Eruvin* 18b, *Bereishit Rabbah* 33). What does it mean to receive food from the hand of G-d? Isn't everything from G-d even if we receive it through other people who are His messengers? While it is true that everything we receive is from G-d, there are different levels of receiving directly and indirectly from Hashem. If, for example, you have just prayed very hard for a job, and then the very next day out of the blue someone calls to offer you the kind of job which fits you perfectly, then you really feel how its *besheit* – from the hand of Hashem. Thus 'and in her mouth was an olive leaf torn off' can also mean that the dove was telling Noach to pray for his food,

just as she did (The Taz on *Bereishit* 8:11). The dove knew that it always had a sustaining meal at Noach's table. Nevertheless, it preferred the bitter olive leaf, which it had torn from the branch by itself with Hashem's help. Rather than receiving free gifts from people, working and earning our own livelihood feels like a more direct way of receiving from Hashem, since Hashem is rewarding us directly for our effort. The Torah teaches us about the importance of effort and that Hashem rewards our effort rather than the level we reach (*Mesilat Yesharim* 1). By putting in hard effort to attain our livelihood "through the sweat of our brow," we attain true freedom like the dove (Malbim).

### The Land of Israel – Protected from Planetary Calamities

The flood had been pouring down for forty days and nights, everything in the entire earth had perished save for Noach and those with him in the Ark (*Bereishit* 7:23). The world had become one vast emptiness of water, desolate from all animals and vegetation, so from where did the dove get an olive leaf? Only seven days prior, the water covered the entire earth (ibid. 8:9-10). How could an olive tree grow and produce leaves within the deep water of the flood's aftermath? Furthermore, the word *תָּרַף*/*taraf* – torn testifies that the dove tore off the leaf from a tree-branch rather than just finding it floating on the face of the water (Rav Yosef Bechor Shor, *Bereishit* 8:11). The Midrash explains that the dove brought the olive leaf from the Garden of Eden (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 33:6). However, how would Noach know then that the water had abated from the earth, since no water entered into the Garden of Eden? It is possible that the gates of the Garden of Eden were closed in order to prevent the floodwaters from entering. Yet, when the water subsided the gates opened. Another possibility conveyed by the same Midrash is that the dove brought the olive leaf from the Mount of Olives in *Eretz Yisrael*, for the waters of the flood did not pour down on the Land of Israel. This fact is testified by the prophet, "Son of man, say unto her: You are a land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon (*גִּשְׁמָה* /*gushma*) in the day of outrage" (*Yechezkiel* 23:24), (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 33:6). Although, the water from the rest of the world gushed out and entered the land of Israel, since it did not rain continuously on the land, the windows of heaven were not opened. Therefore, the trees in the land of Israel endured, although in the rest of the world all trees were destroyed and uprooted by the flood (Ramban, *Bereishit* 8:11). I found this concept of protection very assuring for us who live in the Land of Israel. People from outside of Israel may be worried about us here in the Land, and certain Rabbis may even warn their congregation against coming here because they think it is dangerous. Yet, the Torah teaches us repeatedly that *Eretz Yisrael* is the safest place on earth, protected from planetary calamities.

### The Secret Purity of the Dove and Olive

It is known that the secret of the olive is the secret of *Yesod*. (See [The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](#), pp. 277-305 for a detailed explanation of the correlation between Olive and *Yesod*). *Yesod* is connected to purity and the olive leaf therefore symbolized that the earth had been purified from its *kelipah* (*Be'er Mayim Chayim*). The dove brought particularly an olive leaf rather than any other plant, because olive trees do not receive grafting. The nature of doves is similar to the olive in this way, as they are known to be faithful to their mate. This is why Israel is compared to the dove (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 27:375). The olive leaf in the mouth of the dove thus symbolizes the rectification for the generation of the flood, which was steeped in

immorality and even cattle, beast and fowl did not consort with their own species (Rashi, *Bereishit* 6:12). Unlike the raven who was afraid of the coldness in the aftermath of the flood, the dove, which was righteous, was protected. Likewise, the olive leaves symbolize the righteous, as they are evergreen and withstand the cold and wind of winter. Faithfulness and modesty also protect us not only from sexual diseases, but moreover, *tzniut* creates a protective energy field all around our aura, to protect us from any kind of negative influence.

### Enlightening the World

“The dove came to him at the evening time...” What difference does it make to us whether the dove brought the olive leaf at night or in the morning? During the evening we need light, therefore the Midrash teaches that the dove brought light to the world. “Just as the dove brought light to the world, so shall you bring olive oil and light the candles before me... (*Midrash Tanchuma* 5). This teaches us that the dove brought not only an olive leaf but moreover olives from which Noach made oil *יצהר*/*yitzhar* related to the word *tzohar* that would bring light into the Ark (*Kli Yakar*). In my newly released book, [The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](#), I elaborate on the secret of the jug of oil that Noach made from the olives that the dove brought. I hope you will read there how this jug of oil went from hand to hand throughout the generations until it eventually wound up to miraculously burn for eight days in the Temple.

### The Olive and the Light of Chanukah

The dove came immediately after the flood with an olive leaf in her mouth, symbolizing the olive oil in the Menorah. This alludes to the fact that through the holiness of the Chanukah candles we have the ability to overcome the evil waters of the flood that threatens us in every generation. The evil kingdoms who desire to annihilate the Torah and the Jewish people from the world are the personification of the floodwaters. The dove brought the olive leaf at the evening time which alludes to the heels of Mashiach, as it states “and it shall come to pass, at the time of evening, there shall be light” (*Zechariah* 14:7), (*Likutei Halachot, Orach Chaim, Birkat Hashachar* 5). The flood represented the aspect of sin through which one separates from the light of Hashem’s supervision, and thereby maims the eyes. This is rectified by the Chanukah candle, which pulls down Hashem’s supervision even below ten handbreadths, to acknowledge Hashem’s presence in every place, even in the lower realms. This knowledge pushes away the waters of the flood of confusion. Therefore, when Noach saw the olive leaf he knew that the waters had abated and the sin of the generation of the flood had been rectified (*Likutei Halachot, Chosen Mishpat, Sheluchin* 3).

### The Healing Effect of Olive Leaves

The word *טרף*/*taraf* is also used in connection with healing, “Come, and let us return to Hashem; for He has torn (*טרף*/*taraf*), and He will heal us, He has smitten, and He will bind us up” (*Hoshea* 6:1). The dove brought the evergreen olive leaf from the Garden of Eden to heal Noach who was coughing blood from his hard toil taking care of the animals in the ark (Rabbi Yehoshua Zambrowsky, *Ateret Yehoshua on Parashat Noach*). In my book about the Seven Fruits p 327. I mention a wealth of health benefits of olive leaves. These health benefits include olive leaves ability to help cure arthritis, lower the blood-pressure, and protect against colds and flues.

## Flying out of Exile

I'd like to conclude our weekly Lessons from Nature with a beautiful Torah from a Chassidic commentary called *Yeteiv Lev* on Parashat Noach, The dove alludes to the Shechinah. As it states the congregation of Israel is compared to the dove (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 53b*). (This commentary assumes that we know that the congregation of Israel and the Shechinah are one). Moreover, Israel is compared to the olive, because we have the ability to repent, just like the olive whose oil is extracted by means of crushing. "The dove came to him at the evening time..." alludes to the time of exile. "Behold an olive leaf is torn in its mouth," to glorify in Israel and extract its oil like from an olive, when they will repent for the sake of Hashem. "Then Noach knew that the waters had subsided" – that the exile had ended from the land. May we merit the final geulah (redemption) in the merit of the teshuvah we have done during the previous holidays! May the oil extracted from the crushing of our heart during repentance merit to burn brightly in the Temple!