

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Noach

Maintaining Gratitude Within Grief and Terror

How can we not be Angry at G-d for Allowing His People to Suffer in His holy Land?

How can I feel gratitude now, witnessing the greatest atrocities committed against my people? How can I be thankful when parents are burying their children, and the blood is flowing from the open wounds of our people? The other day an alumna student living outside of Israel called me crying incessantly in her inconsolable grief. She had just given birth to a stillborn daughter after 38 weeks of gestation. What can I say to comfort? How can I console the bereaved parents, the widows, and orphans? How can I feel grateful to Hashem and how can I even not be angry at G-d Who allowed all these suffering and cruel massacres to happen to His people in His holy land? "Hashem is punishing me," cried my alumna student. "Perhaps we can view the calamities from another perspective, far from the self-blaming punishment perception," I ventured. "You are grieving together with the bereaved parents in Israel. This is not a punishment but more likely to be an atonement to make us worthy of the final redemption. Although you have lost your beautiful baby, may her short-lived soul be considered as a sacrifice along with all the sacrifices of the murdered and the suffering our people are experiencing at this time, in the wake of the final redemption." The challenges of these pre-messianic times that we are going through now were predicted by the rabbis of the Talmud. Ulla says: Let the Mashiach come, but after my death so that I will not see him, as I fear the suffering that will precede his coming. Likewise, Rabba says: Let the Mashiach come, but after my death, so I will not see him (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b*). So, isn't there anything we can do to end this suffering? The Talmud continues, Abaye said to Rabba: Why are you so concerned? If we say it is due to the pains preceding and accompanying the coming of the Mashiach, isn't it taught, "What shall a person do to be spared from the pains preceding the coming of the Mashiach? Rabbi Elazar said: They shall engage in Torah study and acts of kindness" (*Ibid.*). You don't have to look far to behold the great kindness with which our people are responding to calamity. Just one example that especially moves me is the tzititz the chareidi yeshiva boys are busy making for the soldiers to help protect them. As for the Torah learning, this is why we have been working night and day to get our bomb shelter, so we can do our part to raise the voice of Torah on the land.

Our Soldier Duty is to Carry on with our Holistic Torah for Mind, Body, and Soul

G-d commanded Noach to build an ark within which he, his family, and all living beings would be saved from the flood:

סַפֵּר בְּרֵאשִׁית פְּרוּךְ זֶ פְּסוּקֵי אֵ וַיֹּאמֶר ה'שָׁם לְנֹחַ בֹּא אִתָּהּ וְכָל בְּיֹתֶךָ אֶל הַתֵּבָה כִּי אֶתְּךָ רְאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בְּדוֹר הַזֶּה:

"Hashem said to Noach, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen as a righteous man before Me in this generation'" (*Bereishit 7:1*).

The aim of the Ark is to provide a safe place – during the storms of life – to make us feel supported, encouraged, and empowered to achieve our goals and aspirations in serving Hashem. Therefore, it became crystal clear to me that in these troubled times when young vulnerable women, who have recently arrived in Israel experience great anxiety, it is my job to provide them with a safe space where they can feel cradled, cared for, and as secure as possible considering the

circumstances. We (my students and I) aren't soldiers on the frontlines, yet we have our soldier duty to continue our mission as a community of holistic Torah for mind, body, and soul. Our students are stepping up to help secure the funds for our safe space that we, with Hashem's help, were able to bring to our land. I am thankful to Hashem who gave me the strength to pull the bomb shelter project through when most of our staff were unable to work. I'm filled with gratitude to the men in my life for their support and help with the bomb shelter project, first of all, to my dear husband Rav Mechael who laid out \$25,000 without hesitation to secure the down payment for the bomb shelter, no less to our son Mordechai Meir who worked tirelessly to find the only available bomb shelter in Israel and make all the arrangements for its arrival. I'm also thankful to all the donors who sent generous donations. Without all of you, we would never have been able to get a bomb shelter and start our Fall Program on time as planned according to our schedule! We still need to raise more money to cover the cost of the bomb shelter. Please keep the donations coming! [Visit www.berotbatayin.org/bomb-shelter to donate!](http://www.berotbatayin.org/bomb-shelter)

Entering the Saferoom of Torah and Prayer

The Hebrew word for ark is תִּבְיָה/tevah also means 'word.' The everlasting lesson of Noah's ark is to engage in the words of Torah and prayer. Just as Hashem instructed Noah to "Go into the ark," so must we too "go into" our words and invest our whole self in every word that emanates from our lips, in Torah learning, in prayer, and in holy speech to one another (Based on the Ba'al Shem Tov, *Amud Hatefilah - The Pillar of Prayer*).

ספר בראשית פרק ו פסוק טז צהר תעשה לתבה...

"You shall make a skylight for the ark..." (*Bereishit* 6:16)

Hashem told Noah to make a skylight in the ark. This refers to either a window or a precious stone, which would shine and give light (Rashi, *Bereishit* 6:16). The window allows the light from outside to enter. This corresponds to when we share Torah we have read or heard from others. We must keep absorbing words of wisdom from our elders, mentors, and teachers, becoming a vessel for their Torah to shine through us. The precious stone is a source of light itself. "From where did Avraham learn Torah? His two kidneys became like pitchers of water, from which Torah gushed forth" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 39:3). When we purify our character and labor hard in Torah, we may receive our own spiritual insights from within, with which we can enlighten and uplift others. Especially at this time, we are called upon to share encouraging Torah words of chizuk that will strengthen everyone's emunah!

Turning the Blame Reflex into Words of Encouragement and Faith

Perhaps the *tevah* - 'word' of Noah serves as a *tikkun* (rectification) for the domino effect of blaming that took place in last week's *parasha*. Rather than being grateful for the woman Hashem created for Adam, he avoided taking responsibility by blaming his wife, Chava. Chava in turn blamed the serpent. Since eating from the Tree of Knowledge, whenever something goes wrong people's natural reflex goes into blaming mode. People tend to take credit for themselves when things go well in life but blame circumstances when things don't go their way. This phenomenon is called "self-serving bias," and nearly everyone is a culprit. Yet Noah's Ark teaches us to pull ourselves up from naturally drowning in the flood of negativity and blame. When the war started there was blaming thrown at me for not yet having gotten a bomb shelter for the *midrasha* (Torah

learning center). Yet, with the help of the majority of brave and positive students speaking words of encouragement, we were able to uplift the spirit of our midrasha community by learning Torah, reciting Tehillim together, and singing spirited songs. While there may still be those who blame the Israeli government for the current war etc. The people of Israel as a whole are responding with courage and faith to the suffering brought by the brutality of the inhuman savage enemy. The Jews worldwide are uniting. Those who have never said a word of praise in favor of the Israeli army are now crying with tears for G-d to protect them and keep them safe. Soldiers with uncovered heads plead for tzitzit from those who arrived to offer them sweets. Real estate agents beg families from the south to enter their empty apartments for free. Community prayers are held worldwide, and the flag of Israel is flying high with words of emunah!

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Noach

- **Dealing with your Anger toward G-d**

When you experience intolerable hardships, pain and suffering, you may not want to admit it, but it is normal to get angry at G-d for allowing this seemingly injustice. Rebbetzin Feigi Twersky pointed out that even anger is an indication of a relationship. In a similar vein, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin said that anger toward Hashem is possible only for one with deep awareness of G-d. The *Gemara (Brachot 31b-32a)* tells us that a number of great individuals spoke quite harshly to Hashem, either out of their personal pain or for the sake of the Jewish people. Great Jews have sometimes expressed much pain and frustration to G-d.

Take a walk and talk to Hashem, pour out all your pain, frustration, and anger to Him. You may even punch your fists into the air or use your body in any way to express your feelings. When you are done, be still, sit down, and close your eyes. Open yourself to receive Hashem's response to your tirade. You may feel His compassionate affection caressing you softly, or you may receive comforting words of empathy. Stay still until you feel a bit of relief and your pain has been somewhat soothed.

- **Finding Relief within Suffering – Which good points can you find amid suffering?**

Gratitude during suffering means looking deeper. It entails peering into the deep of your wounded soul and finding the light. It is a labor of love. It is the work of loving yourself well. It is the work of facing your life's circumstances knowing you are held fast in the Hashem's hug. Meditate on the points of light you experience within your fear, pain and grief.

- **We are our Words – Practice turning negativity into encouraging words of Emunah**

Spend three minutes writing down three examples of something that bothers you. Then spend four minutes substituting positive phrases for your negative ones. Use language that creates an entirely different mental picture of whoever or whatever constitutes the person or thing that annoys you. At first, this might seem difficult, because she/it is really annoying. Once you've written down your word substitutions, the odds are excellent that your negative feelings will begin to dissipate as well. Try it and see where it takes you.

- **Transform Blaming Behaviors**

You might start by changing your perspective to shift away from blaming external forces. Instead of

focusing on what others are doing wrong, try to focus on what you could do to improve the situation. Here are some tips that may help you change your perspective. Practice gratitude: Gratitude can be a powerful tool to help you shift your focus away from blame and toward the positive aspects of your life. You might try to take time each day to reflect on what you are grateful for and focus on these things instead of what could be causing you stress or frustration. Take personal responsibility by acknowledging your role in the situation, without blaming yourself needlessly. Notice the way you are contributing to bettering the situation. Thank yourself and Hashem for empowering you with your particular contribution to better the world.