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A NOTHING WORLD

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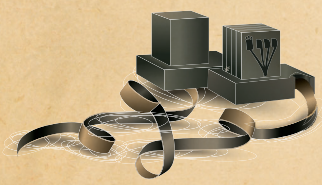

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PARSHAS NOACH

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

A NOTHING WORLD

CONTENTS:

Part I. The Ancient Mabul - 3
Part II. The Modern Day Mabul - 8
Part III. Beyond the Mabul - 12

Part I. The Ancient Mabul

A Sanitation Flood

When we come to the subject of the *Mabul*, one of the first things we immediately understand is that the *Mabul* was a way of eliminating sinful people. וַתִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס – *And the earth became corrupt before Hashem and the earth became filled with violence... and therefore Hashem said,* וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ – *Behold I am going to destroy them with the earth* (Bereishis 6:13). There was wrongdoing in the world so Hakadosh Baruch Hu did what He does constantly—He sanitized the world.

It's like the forest fires; everyone knows that sometimes large conflagrations burn through forests and thousands of trees are destroyed. And although it seems to be a destruction, actually it's a great benefit for the world. Because sometimes when the trees grow old, many of them are

infested with fungi and bacteria. All across the forest, there are sick trees that spread disease and decay to other trees and plants.

And so, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees that the danger has become too widespread and unrelenting, He sends a bolt of lightning to ignite a forest fire that levels the whole forest to the ground. And now the forest is sanitized; the sanitized soil will now produce a new forest that is pure from any disease.

That's one of the purposes of the forest fires—the devastation is actually a cleansing; it's a new beginning.

And so, certainly, we can say that the *Mabul* was a forest fire of water. Hakadosh Baruch Hu was purifying the world from the wicked people; civilization had grown tall and strong but was infected with the disease of wicked and decadent behavior. And when Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw the rot was spreading from family to family, from village to village and city to city, the time finally came to make an end to it all—to send a flood to wipe it all away and thereby sanitize the world.

A Better Option

But actually there's a question here. Because to us it seems that a destroying flood was too much. After all, Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have sent a worldwide epidemic to wipe out all the human beings from the face of the earth and He could have left the world intact. Certainly; there are epidemics that can travel quickly from person to person, from one family to another and then from city to city, killing everyone in its path. Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have punished the *Dor Hamabul* with a pandemic—and just like the rot of society had spread from person to person, *middah k'neged middah*, a disease would be sent by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and the world would be punished in the same manner.

It could have been a sickness that wouldn't affect the animals. Why destroy the beasts after all? And not only the animals went lost; even the earth itself was obliterated. The plants and trees were ripped away; fruit orchards and wheat fields and barley and rice paddies—everything went lost. The seeds were left floating in the water and later they were able to grow again, but there was nothing now. No more fields and forests. No villages or cities. No more houses and buildings. Everything disappeared.

And that's a difficult thing to understand. Why was it necessary to sanitize the world of anything other than men? It was mankind who were the sinners! The cows and sheep didn't do anything wrong! The earth? What did the earth do to deserve destruction? What did the houses and fields and trees do?

And it's such a big question that we're forced now to say another reason for the *Mabul*, a reason that will resolve that difficulty as well.

The Beckoning World

In Koheles (3:11), it states a very important principle: גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *Hashem put the world into the hearts of men.* It means that Hashem made it so that man is captivated by the world. It's a lovable world and we fall head over heels for the world at first sight!

Don't you see how a little child is immediately enthralled with everything around him? You take him to the country, to Monroe, and right away he's infatuated with the outdoors; the grass and the trees and the grasshoppers and the ants—you can't pull him away.

Even the plain street entices him. A little boy, you let him play outside for a little, you need horses to drag him back into the house! I remember how my sons, one after the other, fell in love with the street.

Now, what's on the street already? There was no candy on the street, no amusements on the street, no joy rides—just a plain street. But it draws him anyhow because "Hashem put the world into man's heart."

The Original Tech Giants

And it doesn't end when the child grows up; all the days of our lives, Hashem is putting this world into our hearts. That's His Plan—He wants mankind to love this world because that's the only way Olam Hazeh will function. It takes an interest in the world if there are going to be houses and roads and doctors and car mechanics. People have to be interested in the world if there's going to be a world. That's why Hashem "put the world into the hearts of men."

And the *Dor Hamabul* was exceptional in fulfilling that *possuk*. They were busy with everything, building the world we have now. It was during those early years that mankind gained all the techniques necessary for our daily lives. And even if we have made very many advances since then, they're built almost completely on the work of the ancients; we are merely midgets standing on the shoulders of giants.

They had to learn how to make use of fire; how to cook and bake, and how to make tools. They studied all the plants and trees and fruit in order to develop the science of horticulture and agriculture. They had to learn how to make textiles too. It's not so easy to make clothing. You need hundreds of years of experience; years and years of trial and error. You wouldn't have the faintest idea what to do with a cotton plant or with flax or with the wool on the back of a sheep! It's very complicated.

Why They Lived So Long

How did they sew? They had to invent a needle and a scissor. It means they developed methods of making tools from metal. Something like that took hundreds of years of one person's experience; it took years of genius to perfect the art of metallurgy. You have to have "the world in your heart" if you're going to innovate methods of extracting metals from ore and utilizing those metals.

That's one of the reasons they lived long in those years—Hakadosh Baruch Hu was utilizing their stay in this world to set the stage for the future of mankind. They needed time to accumulate all the information and experience necessary to develop the processes and tools that the world needs in order to function.

And so we understand right away that when Hashem made this world a place that entrances man, it was so that the world should continue to function; so that people should be His messengers in building Olam Hazeh for future generations. And so if it were us, we would say that Koheles means like this: "Hashem put the world into the hearts of men *so that the world should function forever.*"

The World Wide Web

But when we look at the end of that *possuk*, we see that Shlomo Hamelech tells us something altogether different: גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *Why did Hashem put the world into the hearts of men*? What was His intention when He made such an interesting world? מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד סוֹף – *In order that man shouldn't discover the plan of Creation that Elokim made from the beginning to the end.* You hear that? It's a trap! The world is a big trap waiting to snare you!

Of course, Hakadosh Baruch Hu put the world into the minds of men so that they should be busy with it and make it a better world, that's *poshut*; but Shlomo Hamelech is telling us a secret here. More important than building the world, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to build *yourself.* And a person is only built up by overcoming tests.

And so גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *why did He make man so vulnerable to the sights and sounds of this interesting world?* מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים – *In order that man should not discover the work that Elokim made.* He *intentionally* made the world as a trap; will you get lost in all the interesting things? Will you get so busy with the world that you'll go overboard and forget what the world is really for?

When Builders Become Destroyers

And that's what happened in the generations before the *Mabul*. They built the world, but as they did so, they became distracted and forgot about building themselves. The world was so bewitching, so interesting, that they became Olam Hazeh people. As their minds filled with this world more and more, they became so busy with everything that they forgot about their real purpose in the world. Because the only thing that really matters is that you should "*discover the plan of Creation that Elokim made from the beginning to the end.*" Hakadosh Baruch Hu! That's the only subject that should be occupying your mind! Be busy with this world, certainly; but don't ever forget the One Who made the world.

And that's why the *Mabul* came upon the world. The word *Mabul* means that it made everything into *hevel*. The Mabul was *mihabeil* it all; it made everything into nothing! When they looked outside and they saw "a blanket of water covering the face of the earth," (Bereishis 7:20) it was a great shock! Wherever you looked, nothing and nothing and nothing. "Where is everything?! The world that was thumping continuously in our hearts, the world we thought about day and night, the world we lived for, is nothing now!"

Everything is Nothing

Ooh, was that a lesson! Before the *Mabul*, a person's eyes could sweep over the landscape and see trees and gardens and forests and people; and it was all so very interesting—so interesting that they forgot about the main purpose in life.

But now, when Noach and his family, the ones from whom the world would be made again, gazed at the expanse of nothingness on all sides, they said, "Look! The old generation went wild over trying to get more money; now they're all wiped out. They were busy raising livestock; they had big herds of sheep and cattle. And now it's all gone. Some had beautiful gardens; all gone. Many had built beautiful homes, palaces; all wiped out! Some even had kingdoms with power and income as rulers. All gone!"

People had fought with each other over possessions. This one said, 'This field is mine.' The other one said, 'It's mine.' And they were busy sometimes for generations fighting with each other. It's all wiped out. Where are your enemies now? All gone. Where are the people you were jealous of? Gone. Where are the politics, the kings, and the princes? Nothing! All the enmity and hostility and jealousy, all the competition that had been בְּלִבָּם, firmly entrenched in their hearts, everything was wiped out by the *Mabul*.

That's why Hashem said, "Behold I am going to destroy the people *along with the earth*" (*ibid.* 6:13). Even the earth and everything on it will be washed away to teach you the great lesson: It's a busy world and you *must* live in this busy world. But whatever you do, don't get distracted; don't get lost in the world. Don't forget that it's really nothing."

"The way you see it now," Hashem said, "with everything gone, that's the real truth." The *Mabul* made it all *hevel* now so that you should see the truth of Olam Hazeh—it's a beautiful place. It's interesting and entrancing and very distracting; but whatever you do, don't forget the only subject that really matters—the One Who put you into this world.

Part II. The Modern Day Mabul

A Very Busy World

Now, the *Mabul* didn't come for that generation alone; it's written in the Torah for us to learn how to live. And it's a tremendous lesson because we're learning that if we want to avoid a *Mabul* in our lives, if we don't want to waste our lives the way the *Dor Hamabul* did, we have to avoid the preoccupation with this world that keeps our minds busy with everything except what's important in life.

That's why when the Mesillas Yesharim wants to teach us about those things that prevent a person from achieving his purpose in this world, he tells us (Chapter 5) that one of the worst obstacles, actually *the worst* obstacle for a man's progress in this world is *hatipul v'hatirdah olamis*, when people are busy with everything in this world. "When a person is preoccupied with the affairs of this world, his thoughts are bound by the chains of burden and it becomes impossible for him to focus on the service of Hashem".

So Much To Do

We are all so occupied with life, so busy living, that we forget about why we're here. What are the important matters of life? When you learn the Chovos Halevavos, other *seforim* too—Mesillas Yesharim, Shaarei Teshuva, we begin to see that there's a whole world of thinking that's required of us. We're expected to be aware of Hashem always, to recognize His hand in history and in our private lives.

We have to constantly be making *cheshbon hanefesh*, thinking over our lives. Am I going in the right direction? Am I behaving properly with my wife? How could I improve in this detail or that detail? Is my *davening*

getting better every day? Or am I wasting my *davening* by just shaking and saying words? You need a mind that's not busy if you're going to *daven* properly. You need time to study the *siddur*.

There is so much to do with our minds, only that the constant obstacle of *tipul v'tirdah*, of busyness with this world, makes it difficult. There are so many things to do in this world, so many happy things, so many other things, that we are just too busy to think. And that, says the Mesillas Yesharim, is our greatest problem in life. We have no time *and no mind* to put sufficient attention on what is really important. Our minds are cluttered with so many things that the *ikar ha'ikarim*, all the facets of *avodas Hashem*, are almost never considered.

The Best Conversation Piece

Test it. Imagine you're sitting with a nice family of *frum* Jews; let's say it's your family at the Shabbos table. How frequently is Hakadosh Baruch Hu mentioned? I'm not talking *brachos* or *davening*—that's a formality; you can't help yourselves. But in the regular conversation, the conversation that reveals what's really important to a person, how often is *avodas Hashem* the focus?

Let's say a father and his children, a grandfather and his grandchildren, a husband and wife, when they talk, how frequently does Hakadosh Baruch Hu come into the conversation? I think you'd wait a long time before you hear it. Everything else you'll talk about because *that's* the world that is living in your mind—and meanwhile the important issues of life are always pushed to the side.

And we're learning now that Hashem is behind it all. גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the One Who put the world into the minds of man.* And He did it primarily to test us if we'll remember Him despite all the things that are going on. He did it "*in order that man shouldn't discover the plan of Creation that Elokim made from the beginning to the end.*"

Parnasah, Politics and Protests

Now we know why so many things happen in this world, and why they're happening with such diversity. As soon as you come into this world, you are hit over the head by the sights and sounds of Olam Hazeh and from then on, you're stuck—you're busy with the variety of life, with what you see and hear.

All the experiences of this world fill your mind constantly. The pleasant days, the cold and heat, summer, winter and fall. Various kinds of *simchos*, marriage and children and *brissim* and *bar mitzvahs*; all kinds of occasions

in history, some good, some not so good. The world is constantly *mishaneh itim u'machalif es hazmanim*; it's always turning, changing—something is always doing.

Nobody will claim that it's not a busy world. Your *parnassah*, your family, your neighbors, your meals; breakfast and supper. News happening in our private lives; what's taking place outside on the street right now—this protest and that protest—even what we see of the events in far-off countries. Things are taking place all the time that distract us.

Many times, people are busy thinking about their enemies. That's also part of the world that Hashem put into your mind. People are jealous of others and a great deal of time is taken up with that. You'd be surprised how much interest is expended on hostility to fellowmen. Women are sitting and talking on the telephone about their daughters-in-law, about their mothers-in-law, about their sisters-in-law. Oooh-ah, is there busy traffic on the telephones! Everybody is busy with life.

Home Sweet Home

Even the most basic things overwhelm us. It says in the Gemara (Sotah 47a) that חֵן מְקוֹם עַל יוֹשְׁבָיו – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu causes people to love their home place*. That's how it is—your neighborhood finds favor in your eyes.

Of course, one reason for that is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is a *chofetz chesed*; He wants to make people happy, so He makes it so that no matter what street you live on, it finds some sort of favor in your eyes.

Let's say for some reason you have to be in a certain place and you see a big home on a beautiful tree-lined street. It's so magnificent and you'd like to live in such a home. But then in the evening you come back to your own poor home on your poor little street, and you feel that there's nothing like home. Home sweet home! *Chein makom al yoshvav* – Your own home, your own street, finds a special favor in your eyes because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to make you happy.

But there's another reason—to my little mind, I think it's true. And that is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to involve your mind with your home. גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *He wants to put this world into your mind* so that you'll be tested. You become occupied, confused, distracted. There's always something. Maybe the bookcase would look better over here. Maybe we should paint the house or make a bigger porch. We could plant roses in the front garden and make a place for the children to play in the back. Paying the rent or the mortgage is also on your mind. Whatever it is, you're occupied with your environment.

Professional Busyness

Not only your home; your profession too. כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד יִפֶּה לוֹ הקב״ה אֶת אִמְנָתוֹ בְּפָנָיו – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu makes it so each person like his business, his trade* (Brachos 43b). The shoemaker is immersed in the business of repairing shoes; that's his world, and that drives out of his mind all thoughts of anything else. The businessman's head is full of business. The plumber is thinking about piping and the accountant is a numbers man. He's always thinking about how to find legal ways, loopholes, to not pay money to the IRS. That's the business of an accountant; he wants to keep his clients' money out of the hands of the government. And so he becomes very busy with that.

Marriage is a distraction too. When a *chosson* and a *kallah* get married, in the excitement of their preparations and then the wedding itself, they lose sight of the purpose. As soon as they get married, it's as if someone hit them over the head with a club, and now they are entirely unconscious. It takes weeks, even months for them to regain their composure and to realize that now that they are married they have to settle down to the real business of life; having a family and living successfully together in the service of Hashem.

The Family Club

But then a child comes and they are hit over the head again; now there's even more of this world in their minds. *Mazel tovs* and baby food and baby diapers and more expenses. Later, another child, another club; every child is a club over the head.

All kinds of problems of making a living, paying *schar limud*, other bills. And then the children grow up and you have to marry them off and that means more world and more world. Now there's daughters-in-law and sons-in-law and *mechutanim* and grandchildren. Maybe you have to make visits to Monsey now or to Lakewood; it's never ending busyness. You'll always find something to occupy your mind with—everything except what's most important.

And many people never come out of this confusion; they never break free from living lives of distraction in this world until they're very old and they're close to death. Only when he's on the brink of leaving this world, he looks back and says, "Why was I such a fool? Why did I live my whole life distracted by the world that Hashem put into my heart? Why didn't I break free from the shackles of *tipul v'tirdah* and do something with my life?"

Nothing, Nothing, Nothing

And therefore, because of that ever-present danger, the *Mabul* came to teach us the great lesson that it's all *hevel*. Like Koheles is always saying: הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת – *It's all nothing; it's nothing built on top of other nothing.* It's nothing and nothing and nothing.

Now Koheles spends so much time on that subject that it's almost surprising. Why is he so busy making nothing out of everything? It's true; we'll admit that some things are *hevel*. Travel is *hevel havalim*—all the travel bureaus are trying to sell you hot air. They have no real merchandise to sell. Of course, the movies and the theaters are ten times *hevel*. The libraries are filled with shelves and shelves of *hevel havalim*. Romance, *hevel havalim*! Sports, *hevel havalim*! Art, *hevel havalim*! *Frum* Jews will agree with such things—at least we'll say it with our mouths. We can accept such things.

Don't Miss The Point

But the truth is that when Koheles says *hakol hevel* he's not talking only about travel and politics and art and music. That's obvious, you don't need Koheles for that—any good Jew will tell you that being busy with those distractions means that you're wasting your life. Koheles is saying much more than that. He says *hakol hevel – everything* is nothing. Everything?! Our homes, our families, our jobs, our fields? It's all nothing?! It sounds too extreme, even to our *frum* ears.

And the answer is that it's not extreme at all because otherwise you're falling into the trap of גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בִּלְבָּבָם which means that you're missing the entire point of life. Anything that distracts you from "*discovering the work that Elokim made*," is *hevel* because it means you're not succeeding in this world.

It's only when you realize that *hakol hevel*, then you can see that *hakol Hashem*, that everything is Hashem. סוֹף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע – *Finally, everything is understood;* אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים יְרָא – *Fear Hashem,* וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר – *and keep His commandments,* כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם – *because that's everything* (*Koheles* 12:13).

Part III. Beyond the Mabul

The Key to Success

And that's what the *Mabul* came to say. The purpose of the Flood was to be *mehabel kol inyanei olam hazeh*, to wipe away everything and to teach us that the entire *briyah* is nothing.

Everything is nothing! The sky is *hevel havolim!* The earth is *hevel havolim!* Food is *hevel havolim.* Rain is *hevel havolim.* Your house is nothing! Your wife, your children, your job, it's all nothing. The oceans and sunshine and the tremendous forests and wheat fields and barley and corn fields; it's *hakol hevel.* The *Mabul* is saying that everything is zero!

Now, doesn't that sound sad and melancholy? It sounds like we're being sentenced to a life of nothing. And not only is it sad, but it doesn't make sense! After all, Hakadosh Baruch Hu put us here and we're going to be here for a hundred years or so; and if everything is nothing, what's the point of life?

That's why you shouldn't go home yet; I'm not done yet. Because *hakol hevel* is only the beginning—it's only the introduction to the world. And once you learn the *hakdamah*, if you learn it with the right *peirush*, you'll have the key to the most successful stay in this world.

It's All Something

Because once we learn that *hakol hevel*, it brings our mind back to Hashem. They looked out of the window of the *teivah* and they saw that there was nothing left except Hashem! Hakadosh Baruch Hu! *That* was the true lesson of the *Mabul.* Because why did it turn into nothing? Because the one Something with a capital S made it nothing. Everything was gone now, and Hashem reigned supreme over all of Creation.

And that was the lesson that Noach and his family were expected to remember as they rebuilt the world. "Under the water," Hashem said, "there's still a world waiting for mankind. And by means of Noach and his family and all the animals that were saved, the world is going to be rebuilt again. But the sight of an empty world is intended as a permanent reminder that I'm the One standing behind the scenes. And as long as you always remember Me; as long as you're not distracted by it all, then it's not *hevel*—it's Me!"

My One and Only

It's only *hakol hevel* if you're distracted. But if you realize that it's all the *dvar Hashem*, then everything is transformed into reminders of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And therefore, when a person is able to overcome the distractions and he's able to think only about the genuine attraction—*Hashem Echad*—then nothing is *hevel* anymore.

And that's why we say *Shema Yisroel* – Listen O' Yisroel. What should you listen to? What's the most important thing you have to hear? *Hashem Echad!* That's the most important thing; to think about Hashem at all

times. When you say *Hashem Echad* you're not merely saying that He's only One, that He's not like the three-in-one shoe polish of the other religion. Oh no, it's much more than that. "One" means that He's the only One thing in the world worth thinking about! If you're thinking about anything else, you're thinking about *hevel.*

Now, I understand that there will be opposition to this. If you try to tell people these things, they laugh at you; they'll say it's extreme and that it's not realistic. "You have to be a *frum* Jew," they say. "You have to *daven* and you have to learn Torah and do *mitzvos*; but to say everything is Hashem and if not, it's *hevel*?! Only to think about Hashem?! Is that a life?"

And the answer is yes; a resounding yes! That's the best life, the most successful life, the happiest life.

Miracle Babies

Now, in the ancient times, people understood this. You remember when Eisav asked Yaakov Avinu, "Who are these people who are with you?" so Yaakov said, "בָּנַי הֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִי אֱלֹקִים – They're the children that *Elokim* gave me."

"These are my children;" that's what we would say. Who are they? They're my children. No! "They are the children *that Elokim gave me*"!

I knew a *tzaddik* who said, "When I look at my wife, I think of Hashem." He looks at his children, he thinks of Hashem. Where do these beautiful children come from? A *nes*. He's thinking, "This child is a *nes*!"

Now I'm not saying that people should say that out loud because you certainly will look like a showoff or a fool today. Now, it could be it pays to be a fool. מוּטָב לִהְיוֹת שׁוֹטֶה כָּל הַיָּמִים וְלֹא לִהְיוֹת רָשָׁע לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם – *Better to be considered a shoteh all your life, and be approved by Hashem.* (Mishna Eduyos 5:6). That advice, however, has to be taken carefully. It's a recipe for greatness, a prescription, but if it's not applied properly, you'll *stam* be a *shoteh*. But either way, whether you say it aloud or not, that's the ideal that we're talking about now—to see Hashem everywhere, to see Him in everything.

Practice Makes Perfect

Now, I know that when you talk to people who are not *amei ha'aretz*, they'll say they all know about it. "Of course, only Hashem; nothing else, of course, of course." But nobody's doing it *l'maaseh* and therefore we have to talk about it in practice, not just in theory. Because once a person begins to practice this lesson, everything that was once *hevel* is suddenly transformed from nothing into *Hashem Echad.*

Those are the words of the Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter 1). At first, a person is *mima'es b'Olam Hazeh*; it means he's repulsed by this world. "*Hakol hevel*," he says, "The world is nothing." But then he reminds himself of what the *Mabul* was teaching, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the only thing worth thinking about. And once he realizes that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is everywhere and that it's His wish that we should see Him everywhere, he begins to study the world. And now the world becomes important again but in a different way. Everything reminds him of Hakadosh Baruch Hu! It's not *hevel* anymore; it's all Something. And by means of practicing this lesson again and again, he begins to realize that "this world is *not* something repulsive—to the contrary, he learns to love the world" (*ibid.*), because he sees Hashem everywhere.

A Different Type Of Tree

When he looks out of the window and he sees a tree, it's not *hevel*—it's Hashem's tree. Oh, that's a different type of tree already! And when he sees an apple on his table he doesn't get distracted; he sees a *nes* that Hashem made. He's thinking about how such a miracle happened, that from a piece of wood something edible grew. How Hashem cooked it on the tree and now it's a package of tasty food. A little bit of sugar it has in it, a little bit of sourness too; it's just right. And it's wrapped in a beautiful wrapper that protects the fruit and is edible too.

Look at a piece of bread. Where does the bread on my table come from? הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ – *He's the One Who brings it out of the earth!* Oh, so it's not *hevel* anymore; for the thinking person, a tree and an apple and a slice of bread are reminders of *Hashem Echad*. Because when you look at the things themselves, just to enjoy them, so *hakol hevel*. You eat up the food and it turns into manure, that's all. But if you're eating the food for the purpose of reminding yourself about Hashem then it's the opposite of *hevel*.

It Never Rains

Now, those are only a few examples; actually, the opportunities to take the world of *hevel* and transform it into a world of *Hashem Echad* are endless. You know, when it's raining outside, some people get excited: "Look, it's raining! It's thundering! Oooh, it's so windy!" But that's *hevel*! In *goyish* they say, "*es reggint* – it's raining." But we say *Morid Hageshem* – *Hashem* brings down the rain. It doesn't just rain; *Hashem* makes it rain! It means we're not getting distracted by the rain; just the opposite—the raindrops remind us about Hashem.

As the drops come down, we look at the rain and marvel at this miracle that is taking place now. Where is this fresh, pure water coming from? Is there a big reservoir somewhere in the sky?

No; all of the rain came from below, from the dirty and salt-filled oceans. Only that the heat of the sun distills the water and it's brought up in the form of pure vapor and now clouds filled with pure water are created. And then the heavy clouds are transported by Hashem's winds; *Mashiv ha'ruach* – He is the One Who blows the clouds over land and then He condenses it into water again and it falls back to the earth where it's needed.

The Sun No Longer Shines

And as soon as the water comes down, it starts moving down mountains and hills by the miraculous force of gravity, and it spreads out to wherever it's needed. And whatever is not used makes its way back to the sea: כָּל הַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים אֶל הַיָּם – *All the streams go to the sea,* וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מָלֵא – *but the sea is never filled* (Koheles 1:7). Because as soon as the water comes to the sea the sun gets busy again—no, not the sun; the sun is *hevel.* We say *Hashem's sun* gets busy once again lifting huge masses of water vapor up from the sea. It's a tremendous miracle; an assembly line providing water to the earth in a constant cycle.

Suddenly the sun is not the sun anymore. The sunshine is not sunshine. The wind is not wind. The clouds are not the clouds. The oceans aren't just oceans. If they are, then they're just הֶבֶל הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל. But now, because of our new attitude, everything is transformed from *hakol hevel* into *Hashem Echad.*

Seeing Through the Kaleidoscope

That's the great test that we're living with in this world, the test of גַּם אֶת הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם – *Hashem put the world into our hearts.* Everything in this world is percolating within our hearts day and night, day and night. The important things—our family, our friends, *parnassah*—and the not so important things as well; all kinds of things to do and things to see, all kinds of people to meet and all kinds of circumstances.

And one of the purposes for this kaleidoscope of life is to make our minds occupied; it's a test—will we get caught up in what we see and what we hear, and maybe we'll forget about Hashem?

The test of life is to be able to overcome the obstacle of *hatipul v'hatirdah*; the confusion of the environment. Because after all life *does* have a purpose – it doesn't have to be *hevel.* And only when a man is able

to battle against all the confusions of life, and despite all the things that are constantly happening to him, despite all the sights and sounds that constantly present themselves, he's not *masiach da'as* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu; that's the man who has succeeded in this world!

And because remembering Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the most important thing, it was worth it to bring a *Mabul* upon the world just to teach that lesson forever and ever.

The great Flood came to destroy everything in order to demonstrate that all the things that people considered important until now are really nothing. What's left in the world? There's nothing left to talk about, nothing to think about. Only water on all sides, just desolation. They were sitting in the *teivah* and there was nothing to do except to look out and see nothing. And that's the way the progenitors of the newly built world would experience that actually it's only Hakadosh Baruch Hu that belongs in our hearts, and with that understanding, they would rebuild the world again.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

The Lesson of the Mabul Three Times A Day

The Rav *zatzal* said, "We have to talk about it in practice; not just in theory." And now that we finished talking about *how* to practice it, it's time to actually practice it. During this coming week I will *bli neder* stop three times a day and I will spend twenty seconds each time taking the world out of my mind and replacing it with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. For example, when I'm walking in the street and feel the sunlight, I will think for twenty seconds about how it's Hashem shining His light and His warmth down on me.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:
432 – Bringing Up Children 5 | **639 –** Justify or Condemn | **933 –** The Best Day in The Year | **981 –** What Is Important | **E–65 –** The World Diverts the Mind

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Shabbos Inspired

לע"נ שרה נטשה בת דבורה שהין · דינה ברכה בת שרה נטשה · דבורה מזל בת שרה נטשה

Indescribable Closeness to Hashem

Why is it that we have the special halachah of *Kabbalas Shabbos*, greeting Shabbos?

There are two kinds of mitzvos. The majority of mitzvos, such as eating matzah or putting on tefillin, fall into the first category. When we fulfill these mitzvos, the main focus is that we are doing as Hashem commanded. But there is another kind of mitzvah. For example, *"Three times a year, all your males shall appear before Hashem, your God, in the place He will choose."* (*Devarim* 16:16) This is the mitzvah of coming to the Beis HaMikdash for the *Shalosh Regalim* in order to "see" Hashem's presence and be "seen" by Him. Here, fulfilling the mitzvah is more than just doing as Hashem commanded. It is actually greeting and receiving Hashem's presence. It is a personal relationship with Hashem.

So it is with *Shabbos Kodesh*. It is the main mitzvah in which we develop a personal relationship with Hashem. When we greet Shabbos, we are actually greeting the *Shechinah*.

Song plays a special role in *Kabbalas Shabbos*. We begin *Kabbalas Shabbos* with the words "*Lechu neranenah laShem*." The word *neranenah* comes from the root word of *rinah*, song. Next we say "*Shiru laShem shir chadash*," again emphasizing *shirah*, song. We continue with the joyous song of "*Lecha Dodi*." Then comes "*Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbos*," again highlighting song with the double expression "*mizmor shir*."

When Shabbos enters, our entire *avodah* is through song. Why?

Some things simply cannot be expressed in words. For example, the taste of food. We can say a certain food is bitter or sweet, but no one in the world can explain what "bitter" or "sweet" is. We can say only, "Do you remember when you ate that sweet thing? What you tasted then, I taste now."

The only language for communicating things too deep for words is song. If our ear is attuned, we hear the moving message borne by the melody. When Shabbos begins, we attain such closeness to Hashem that it cannot be expressed in words. So, at this exalted moment, we don't talk; we sing. Nothing less will do. Whoever has an attuned ear understands that there is no other way to express the *neshamah*'s joy over the coming of *Shabos Kodesh*. If someone doesn't understand, there is no way to explain it.

Shabbos touches the deepest feelings in the heart of the Jewish people. At this time we meet *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and an indescribable love is aroused. All we can say is: "*Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbos, tov l'hodos laShem!*"

This is what Shabbos is all about. It strikes a chord hidden deep within the Jewish heart. It is the point of connection between us and Hashem!

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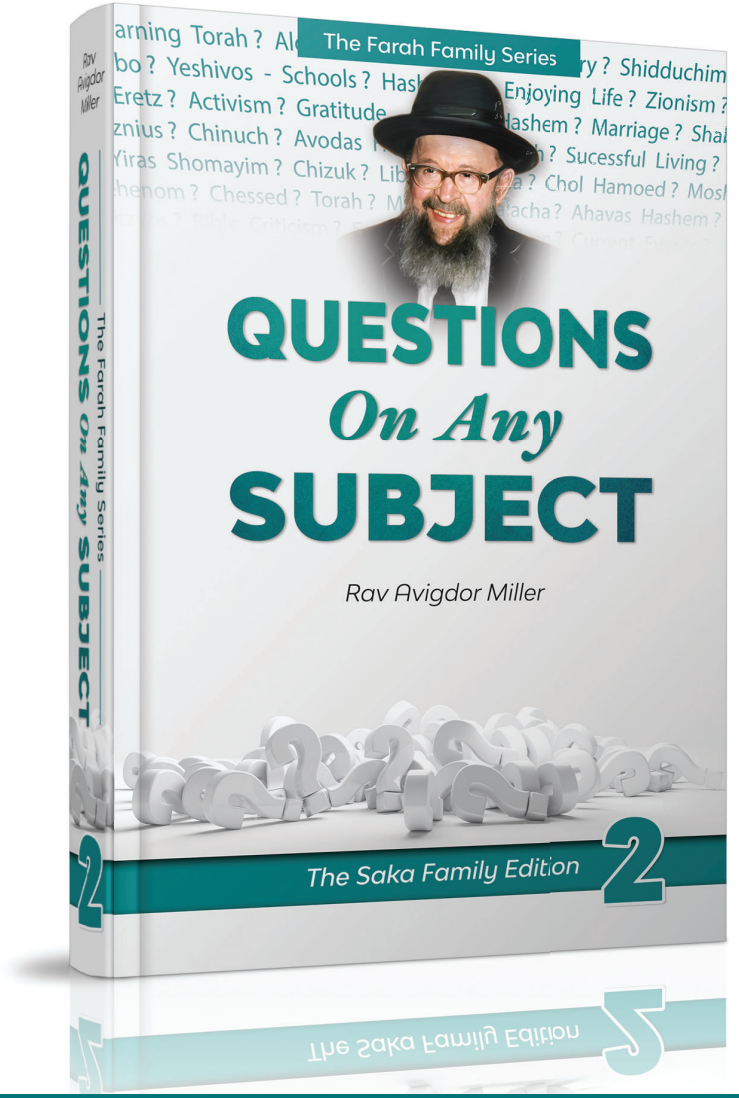

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