


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש


Fri. 24 October 2014 - Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5775  
 Sedra Noah

**TO SEE AND NOT TO SEE**

**A** CENTRAL ISSUE IN LIFE CONCERNS OUR PERCEPTION OF OTHER people. There are the members of our family, our friends and colleagues, people in the street, others whom we do not know directly but hear about. From time to time any of these people might do something which - according to the value scale of the Torah - is wrong or negative. How do we view them and their actions?

There is a famous teaching by the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, that when someone sees bad in another person, it indicates that this bad quality is in the viewer himself. Looking at others is similar to looking at a mirror: if one's own face is clean, one sees only a clean face.

A later Chasidic teacher, Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl, commented that the extrapolation of this is that a perfect Tzaddik (righteous person) who has no evil in him at all - will see only good in everyone. But this raises the question of the virtue of passivity as opposed to social action and the ongoing attempt to improve society. Even according to Rabbi Nachum, is this an approach to life that the individual who is not a perfect Tzaddik is asked to imitate?

	In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'
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An incident in the Sedra<sup>1</sup> helps us understand that there are two kinds of seeing which relate to all of us.

After the Flood, Noah and his family emerged from the Ark and began to return to ordinary life. The Torah tells us that Noah planted a vineyard. When the grapes ripened he made wine, and got heavily drunk. As a result he was lying naked in his tent.

One of his sons, named Ham, saw that his father was naked and told his two brothers, Shem and Japhet. Shem and Japhet walked backwards into the tent with a blanket and covered their father. The Torah adds “they did not see the nakedness of their father”<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of this event, Ham was cursed, and Shem (the ancestor of Abraham) and Japhet were blessed. Clearly the Torah intends that we should learn something from this incident, which is discussed extensively by the Sages.

An aspect pointed out by the Lubavitcher Rebbe is that two different modes of seeing are being described. Ham saw the nakedness: for him this was just something to criticise or to ridicule. To him applies the idea that it was really his *own* immodesty which was being revealed.

By contrast Shem and Japhet did *not* see the nakedness of their father. This means not just that they did not see it with their eyes. It means that their response to it was not criticism, nor ridicule, but the question: “How should I respond? What do I have to do about this situation?”.

In other words, explains the Rebbe, they did not “see”. Instead they perceived only a call to positive response.

This applies to all of us. When confronted with negativity of any kind the imperative is to understand it as a demand to do something to improve the situation. This is the path of Shem and Japhet. The effect is that although being aware of the problem one does not “see” it. The mirror remains pure: one sees the world not as ugly and evil, but in terms of the ultimate state of perfection which our response will help it achieve<sup>3</sup>.

1. Genesis 6:9-11:32. 2. Gen. 9:23. 3. See the Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 10 p.24 ff, translated by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in *Torah Studies* pp.6-9.

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SEDRA NOAH

**THE RAINBOW**

The Berger family was sitting in their car, driving down the motorway. They were going for a trip into the countryside on Sunday afternoon. It had begun as a bright sunny day, but now it was raining.

“Rain, rain, rain,” David complained, staring out the window. “Look at the rain! It’s pouring!”

“Welcome to England – the land where it always rains,” Judy giggled.

“Don’t laugh,” David said. “It’s true. At least, almost...”

“Well, at least we’re in the car, where it’s warm and dry,” Mrs. Berger pointed out. She turned on some music and the mood in the car brightened considerably.

A while later, as he was in the middle of trying to beat Judy in a game of noughts and crosses, David’s eyes flitted over to the window. “Hey! The rain stopped! Maybe we’ll be able to go for a walk!”

Judy lifted her eyes from the paper. “You’re right! And – hey! Look, David, look!”

“Look over there!” Judy pointed. “Do you see it?”

“See what?”

“I see it,” Mr. Berger said. “It’s a rainbow.”

“A rainbow? Hey! Where’s the rainbow?” David scanned the sky. “Oh you’re right! There’s a rainbow!” “It’s so pretty!” Judy exclaimed.

“Children, there’s a blessing to say when we see a rainbow!” said Mr. Berger. He said the blessing, and everyone else repeated it. Then Mr Berger said it in English: “Blessed are You Hashem, our G-d, King of the world, Who remembers the Covenant, Who is faithful to His Covenant and Who keeps His word”.

“What Covenant?” David inquired.

“Do you know what Sedra it is this week?” asked his mother.

“Noah!” said David. “That’s right!” Mrs Berger said. “And what happens in this Sedra?”

“I know! There’s a flood! Only Noah and his family get saved along with all the animals!” Judy said eagerly. “And then there’s something about a rainbow.”

“Yes, after the Flood, when Noah came out of the ark, G-d made the sign of the rainbow in the sky as a promise that He would never bring another Flood to the whole world. That is the Covenant, the promise.”

“But isn’t the rainbow because of light refracting through the raindrops?” asked David. “Yes,” said his mother. “A commentator says that G-d made that property of Nature into the sign of His Covenant. So when you see the beautiful colours, you remember G-d’s promise not to bring another Flood...”

“And anyway,” said Judy, “G-d made all the properties of Nature..”

“Well, it’s a wonderful promise!” David said. The car continued speeding down the motorway, towards a nice place to go for a walk, and the rainbow slid out sight.

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