

Noach – Somewhere Over The Rainbows – Gershon Hepner

ד' חשוון תשע"ז – 5th November 2016 – שבת פ' נח

After the Mabul, HaShem guaranteed Noach that He would never again destroy the world with water. The rainbow would serve as a dual reminder sign:

- a) to HaShem of His guarantee and
- b) to Mankind that their behaviour renders them deserving of destruction.

Rashi (9:12) quotes the Midrash Rabboh (35:2) that during the lifetimes of Chizkiyohu and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai no rainbows were ever visible. On account of the greatness of these individuals, there was no need for any such reminders.

The Bnei Yisoschor (Chodesh Iyar 3:4) gives this Midrash as the source for the custom of children to play with bows and arrows on Lag BaOmer, the yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The shape of the toy bow prompts us to recall the absence of rainbows during his days.

In Kesubos (77b) we are told that no rainbow appeared during lifetime of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, again due to his extreme piety.

The Ramban explains that the shape of the rainbow imitates that of an inverted bow. In the same way that soldiers invert their bows when on peaceful missions, so too HaShem's rainbow is 'pointed' away from planet Earth, as a symbol of peace towards Man.

The Chizkuni derives from Yechezkel (1:28) that the brilliance, beauty and majesty of the rainbow is a representation of Divine glory. Seeing as a king would not be prepared to appear in the company of his disgraced servants, a rainbow's presence overhead is symbolic of HaShem's love for humanity, and of His reluctance to destroy His world.

In Chagiga (16a) Rovo tells us there anyone who observes a rainbow should fall upon his face, as the Shechinah is represented by the rainbow.

Rabbi Yehuda bar Nachmeni (ibid) warns us that prolonged gazing at a rainbow weakens a person's eyesight.

Pirkei Ovos (5:6) lists the rainbow as of the ten items created by HaShem at twilight on Friday evening, shortly before the commencement of the world's very first Shabbos. These items are, by definition, of a spiritual nature, and therefore could not be created at the same time as the rest of the Universe.

Were rainbows visible before the days of Noach?

The Rishonim point out that a rainbow is a scientific phenomenon, and is the result of passing light through moisture. They discuss whether rainbows were visible before Noach or not.

According to the Ramban rainbows are a fact of science, and were in existence from the time of Creation. After the Mabul, HaShem designated them to serve as a sign of His covenant not to destroy the world.

The Ibn Ezra insists that the rainbow was a brand new element of Creation that was introduced after the Mabul. He explains that prior to the Mabul, the Sun's rays were not strong enough to produce a rainbow effect, and that they were intensified after the Mabul in order to create this new phenomenon.

The Seforno explains that the rainbow is a scientific fact, originating from the start of Creation. Following the Mabul, HaShem created a new phenomenon – **the double rainbow!** This occurs when a second rainbow appears on the outside of a first rainbow. Its colours are fainter and more pastel-like, and they appear in reverse order! The sequence of colours in a normal rainbow (working inwards from the outermost band) is Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. This sequence is reversed in the larger, fainter and outer rainbow – the secondary one. The Seforno explains that this reversal is a representation of the lone Tzaddik who lives among a degenerate society. While all those around him lead a life opposed to Torah-values, he alone saves his generation through his devotion to HaShem. The reversed rainbow colours depict the modus vivendi of the Tzaddik, which is diametrically opposed to that of his contemporaries. It was this *double rainbow* that was the new creation after the Mabul; created to demonstrate how Noach's staunch refusal to stoop to the low levels of society, ultimately saved the human race.

Le'lluy nishmas my father in law, Reb Yaakov Chaim ben Reb Menachem HaLevi, whose Yahrzeit falls on 9th Cheshvan.
