



A Fantastic Explanation from the Brilliant Rabeinu Yaakov of Lisa

The Wonderful Lesson from the Sign of the Rainbow HKB”H Illuminates for Us Even through the Clouds of Our Iniquities

In this week’s parsha, parshas Noach, it is fitting that we examine the changes HKB”H made after the mabul with regards to how He runs the world. He promised that He would not bring another mabul to destroy all living creatures, as it is written (Bereishis 8, 20):

”וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּיַח לַה' וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר וַיַּעֲלֵה עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ, וַיִּרַח ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ, וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל לִבּוֹ לֹא אוֹסִיף לִקְלֹל עוֹד אֶת הָאָדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לִבּ הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעוּרָיו, וְלֹא אוֹסִיף עוֹד לַהֲכֹת אֶת כָּל חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי.”

Then Noach erected a mizbeiach to Hashem and took of every pure animal and of every pure bird, and offered burnt-offerings (“olos”) on the mizbeiach. Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said in His heart: “I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the design of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again continue to smite every living being, as I have done.” Rashi comments: “Of every pure animal”: He said, “HKB”H did not command me to take in seven by seven from each of these except to bring a korban from them.”

Thus, we learn a tremendous chiddush . HKB”H’s promise not to visit another mabul on creation came in the merit of the pleasing aroma of the korbanos offered by Noach after exiting the “teivah” (ark). In fact, we learn another chiddush from here. Even before the mabul, HKB”H in His infinite mercy and kindness prepared a remedy to abolish the punishment of the mabul by instructing Noach to bring seven pairs of every pure animal into the “teivah” that would serve as korbanos after exiting the “teivah.”

Hence, we will endeavor to explain the magnificent power of the korbanos—their ability to eliminate the possibility of a future mabul.

Additionally, we will explore the phenomenon described further on in the text. Not only did HKB”H promise not to inflict another mabul on the world, but He established a covenant with the inhabitants of earth. The rainbow visible among the clouds would signify this covenant and His promise not to bring another mabul to the world, as it is written (ibid. 9, 12):

”וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים זֶאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדוֹרוֹת עוֹלָם, אֶת קַשְׁתִּי נִתְּתִי בַעֲנַן וְהִיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ, וְהִיְתָה בַעֲנַנִּי עַנַן עַל הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְאָתָה הַקַּשֶׁת בַּעֲנַן. וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל בֶּשֶׂר וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לִמְבּוּל לְשַׁחַת כָּל בֶּשֶׂר, וְהִיְתָה הַקַּשֶׁת בַּעֲנַן וְרִאִיתִיהָ לְזִכּוֹר בְּרִית עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹקִים וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל בֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל הָאָרֶץ.”

And G-d said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I give between Me and you, and every living being that is with you, to generations forever; I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall happen, when I cloud the earth with a cloud [Rashi: when I consider bringing darkness and destruction to the world], and the bow will be seen in the cloud, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living being among all flesh, and the water shall never again become a mabul to destroy all flesh.”

The fact that HKB”H found it necessary to establish the rainbow in the clouds as a covenant and did not suffice

with His promise alone not to bring another mabul comes to teach us a valuable lesson. Hence, it behooves us to explore the nature of the lesson conveyed by the rainbow visible in the clouds.

The Sight of the Rainbow Reveals the Presence of HKB”H through the Clouds of Sins

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing an explanation from the brilliant Rabeinu Yaakov of Lisa, zy”a—who is well-known in the Torah-world for his compositions Chavas Da’as on Yoreh Deiah and Netivos HaMishpat on Choshen Mishpat. In his sefer Nachalas Yaakov, on this week’s parsha, he presents a fascinating idea regarding the rainbow.

When David HaMelech wished to depict the revelation of HKB”H in the world, he proclaimed (Tehillim 84, 12): **כי “שמש ומגן ה’ אלקים”**—for a sun and a shield is Havaya Elokim. He compared the illumination of HKB”H, as it were, to the sun that illuminates the entire world. On the other hand, in Yechezkel hanavi’s prophetic vision, he compares the glory of Hashem to the appearance of the rainbow among the clouds (Yechezkel 1, 28): **מראה . . . מראה “כמראה הקשת אשר יהיה בענן . . . מראה”**—like the appearance of a bow that would be in the clouds . . . such is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem. We must endeavor to explain these two depictions of the appearance of Hashem’s illumination in the world—the comparison by David HaMelech to **“the sun”** versus the comparison by Yechezkel hanavi to **“the appearance of a bow.”**

He explains in Nachalat Yaakov that when Yisrael occupy themselves with Torah and mitzvot, they purify the atmosphere between the earth and HKB”H of the cloudy barrier of iniquities. This allows the light of HKB”H to shine brightly in the world like the sun in the sky above without clouds concealing its brightness. Therefore, David HaMelech, who lived in an era when the sovereignty of Yisrael reigned in the world due to their good deeds and merits, depicted the appearance of Hashem’s illumination in the world as: **“כי שמש ומגן ה’ אלקים”**—a sun and shield.

In contrast, Yechezkel hanavi lived in an era characterized by Yisrael’s spiritual descent due to their numerous sins.

Consequently, the atmosphere was filled with spiritual clouds generated by their iniquities. These clouds constituted a barrier separating the lowly, corporeal human beings from HKB”H. In the words of the navi (Yeshayah 59, 5): **“כי אם עוונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלקיכם”**—rather, your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d. In a similar vein, it is written (Eichah 3, 44): **“סכותה”**—You wrapped Yourself in a cloud that prayer cannot pierce. Therefore, Yechezkel depicted the appearance of HKB”H’s illumination in the world: **“כמראה”**—like the illumination of the sun obscured by clouds appearing in the shape of a bow.

This then is the difference between the situation before the mabul and after it. In the generation of the mabul, the clouds of iniquities--generated by the corrupt behavior of all life on earth—became an obstructive barrier preventing the illumination of HKB”H from illuminating the earth and its inhabitants with abundant sustenance. Consequently, the natural order was destroyed.

After the mabul, however, HKB”H entered into a covenant with all of the earth’s inhabitants. Even if the world’s atmosphere would fill up, chas v’shalom, with clouds of iniquity, constituting an obstructive barrier; nevertheless, His brilliant light would penetrate the murkiness and continue to illuminate and sustain creation. The appearance of this light resembles the light of the sun as seen through the clouds in the shape of a bow. This is what Yechezkel saw in his vision: **“כמראה הקשת אשר יהיה בענן”**.

Nevertheless, this idea of the Chavas Da’as deserves further explanation. Why did HKB”H introduce this wonderful new arrangement after the mabul in the merit of the korbanos offered by Noach? As it is written: **“Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma and Hashem said in His heart, ‘I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man’”**—in other words, He would never bring another mabul to the world. Furthermore, why did HKB”H choose to appear when illuminating the world through the clouds in the form of a bow? What is the deeper connection between the appearance of the sign of the bow in the clouds and the fact that He is illuminating the world through clouds of iniquity?

The Pillar of Smoke of the Korban Broke through the Cloud of Concealment

I was struck by a fascinating idea regarding the explanation of the righteous Chavas Da'as. I would like to propose an explanation as to why HKB"H chose to illuminate the world even through clouds of iniquity in the merit of korbanos. We will refer to what we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 5, 5). It states that one of the ten miracles that transpired in the Beis HaMikdash was: "ולא נצחה הרוח את עמוד העשן"—the wind did not disperse the pillar of smoke generated by the korbanos; rather, it continued to ascend toward the heavens. The language employed by the Tanna suggests that there was a struggle between the wind and the pillar of smoke, and it was a miracle that the wind did not defeat the pillar of smoke. We will endeavor to comprehend the nature of this struggle.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on a teaching in the Zohar Chadash (Terumah) pertaining to the smoke that rose from the korbanos offered on the mizbeiach. If Yisrael were innocent and guiltless, the smoke would ascend heavenward in a straight line without deviating to the sides. If not, the smoke would deviate to the right or to the left. Thus, they recognized that it was a time of divine goodwill and favor above and below, and HKB"H was exceptionally pleased with Yisrael's deeds.

Our sacred sefarim explain at great length that prosecutorial and harmful forces are generated as a result of man's sins; they fill the space between the earth and the heavens. They prevent man's tefilos from ascending to heaven. This is the implication of the passuk: "סכותה-- כעגן לך מעבור תפלה" **You wrapped Yourself in a cloud that prayer cannot pierce.** Regarding this phenomenon, we find the alarming words of the divine kabbalist, Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, ztz"l:

"אמר שלמה המלך ע"ה (קהלת ד-יז), שמור רגלך כאשר תלך אל בית האלקים. הודיענו בפסוק זה שצריך האדם לבדוק עצמו ולהיזהר כשרוצה להתפלל לפני ה' יתברך, ולראות ולהבין אם יש לו מקטרגים ומעכבים לקבל תפילתו, ויש לו לסקל המסילה ולהרים מכשול מדרכיו. משל לאדם ההולך לחצר המלך להפיק שאלה, שהוא צריך להזדרז ולדעת אם יש בדרך פגע או סכנה...

כל שכן בהיות האדם נכנס להקביל פני מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה יתברך ויתעלה, שיש לו לאדם להבין ולדעת כי מן הארץ ועד הרקיע אין שם מקום פנוי... אלא הכל מלא המזונים, מהם לשלום מהם למלחמה, מהם לטובה ומהם

לרעה, מהם לחיים ומהם למוות... וכל אלו המחנות בין הארץ ובין השמים, דוגמת ההולך בדרך במקום סכנה, כך תפילתו של אדם עוברת בין אלו הכיתות ועולה עד לרקיע, אם יש בו זכות, לא יפגעו לסטים בתפילתו, ואם אין בו זכות, כמה פגעים ומשחיתים פוגעים בדרך".

Shlomo HaMelech a"h says (Koheles 4, 17): "Guard your foot when you go to the House of G-d"? He informs us in this passuk that a person must check himself and be careful when he wants to pray to Hashem, blessed is He. He must see and understand whether or not he has prosecutors and forces that might delay the acceptance of his tefilah. Then he must clear the path and remove the obstacles that are in his way. It is analogous to a person who goes to the king's court to request something; he must be aware ahead of time whether or not there is a problem or danger in his way . . .

All the more so when a person enters to face the King of Kings, HKB"H . . . he must recognize that there is no vacant space between the earth and the heavens . . . instead, it is all filled with many forces, some of them for peace and some of them for war, some for good and some for bad, some for life and some for death . . . and all of these camps between the earth and the heavens represent a dangerous path that one must pass. Similarly, a person's tefilah must pass between these various factions and ascend heavenward. If he is deserving, the negative factions will not harm his tefilah; if he is not deserving, it will encounter many harmful and destructive forces along the way.

With this in mind, we can begin to comprehend the incredible function served by the smoke of the korbanos ascending heavenward. This holy smoke coming from a korban offered on the mizbeiach in the Beis HaMikdash possessed the power to blaze a holy path through the clouds of prosecutors generated by man's sins. This enabled the tefilos and teshuvah of the sinner that brought the korban to ascend upward without any interference. Thus, it should be obvious that all of the winds of tumah gathered together to fiercely combat and oppose the smoke rising from the korbanos. Their aim was to prevent the smoke from blazing a path through the clouds of iniquity.

This is the implication of the teaching cited from the Zohar hakadosh. If the smoke rose straight upwards

without deviating to the sides, it indicated that it was a time of divine goodwill and favor in the heavens. Therefore, the winds of tumah did not affect the pillar of smoke; it blazed a direct path through the clouds of iniquity. This is the meaning of the Mishnah: “ולא נצחה הרוח את עמוד העשן”—one of the miracles that transpired in the Beis HaMikdash was that the wind of tumah did not prevail over the pillar of smoke; it ascended to the heavens in a straight path without deviation.

The Term עשׂן Is an Abbreviation for the Three Klipos ע׳קרב ש׳רף נ׳חש

It is with great pleasure that I would now like to add a wonderful allusion. It is written (Devarim 8, 15): “המוליכך—Who leads you through the great and awesome midbar (wilderness)—snake, fiery serpent and scorpion. The Zohar hakadosh (Pekudei 237a) explains that these forces of tumah reigned in the midbar. The Megaleh Amukos (Balak) writes that when the Torah says of Bilam harasha when he goes to curse Yisrael (Bamidbar 22, 22): “ושני נערי עמו”—and his two young men were with him—it is informing us that he took with him the three klipos alluded to by the first letters of ש׳רף נ׳חש ע׳קרב—namely, עשׂן. The Kehilat Yaakov writes that this is the secret meaning of that which is written (Shmuel II 22, 9): “עלה עשן באפו”—**smoke (עשׂן) rose up in His nostrils.** It teaches us that at times of judgment, the three klipos symbolized by the term עשׂן—ע׳קרב ש׳רף נ׳חש—prevail.

It is fitting that we interject what we have learned in the Gemara (Menachos 99b). The mouth of Gehinnom, where the reshaim are judged, is narrow, so that the smoke will remain inside and will not escape. The Ben Yehoyada explains the rationale for this phenomenon: כדאי שיהיו נידונין בעשן, על אשר דבקו בשלשה קליפות, שהם נחש שרף עקרב, דראשי תיבות—**so that they will be judged by the smoke—for having adhered to the three klipos, namely, עשׂן.** This then is the allusion regarding the עשׂן (smoke) of the korbanos rising upwards. It bursts through the three klipos of ע׳קרב ש׳רף נ׳חש that fill the space between heaven and earth with the iniquities of mankind in keeping with the words: **עלה עשן באפו.** Thus, the smoke blazes a path to the heavens to mitigate and sweeten the judgment.

We can now rejoice; for we have shed some light on the comments of the Chavas Da’as. Only after Noach offered korbanos did HKB”H promise to continue to illuminate and influence the world even through clouds of iniquity; because the smoke of the korbanos blazed a path through the clouds of the klipos. This is the implication of the passuk: “וירח ה’ ריח הניחוח”. From the holy path through the clouds of iniquity created by the smoke of the korbanos, HKB”H smelled the pleasant aroma of the korbanos ascending upwards.

Therefore, due to that aroma, HKB”H promised that in the merit of the korbanos that Yisrael were destined to offer in the Beis HaMikdash, he would not bring another mabul to destroy the world. Even though the clouds of iniquity prevent His sustaining light from illuminating the world; nevertheless, in the merit of the smoke of the korbanos bursting through those obstructive clouds, the light of HKB”H would also shine through the clouds of iniquity like the appearance of the bow.

The Three Colors of the Rainbow Corresponding to the Three Holy Avos

Following this line of thought, we will proceed to explain why HKB”H chose to reveal Himself in the world by illuminating through clouds of iniquity resembling a rainbow in the clouds. Now, the Rishonim are puzzled by the covenant of the rainbow. After all, the rainbow is a natural phenomenon resulting from the rays of the sun striking the clouds. This question can be reconciled from the commentary of the Ramban himself (ibid.). He explains that the sign of the covenant of the bow is conditional—the bow must face upwards toward the heavens and not downwards toward the earth.

Thus, we can resolve the apparent difficulty. While it is true that the rainbow is a natural phenomenon; however, the laws of nature do not dictate that the bow should face upwards. Hence, HKB”H established the following covenant with the inhabitants of earth. When a rainbow appears in the sky facing upwards, it signifies that HKB”H will not shoot arrows toward the earth in the form of a devastating mabul.

This provides us with a better understanding of the following passuk in our parsha (9, 17): **וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל נֹחַ: "זֹאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הִקְיִמֹתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל הָאָרֶץ"—G-d said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have confirmed between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth."** Rashi comments: **"This is the sign of the covenant"—He showed him the bow and said to him, "Here is the sign of which I spoke."** For what purpose did HKB"H show Noah the bow? Based on what we have learned, we can suggest that HKB"H indicated to Noah that the bow is an auspicious sign only when it faces upwards. Notwithstanding, it is still incumbent upon us to explain the significance of the upward-facing bow.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Pinchas 216a) that the rainbow is made up of three colors—white, red and green—corresponding to the three Avos. White signifying the midah of chesed corresponds to Avraham; red signifying the midah of gevurah corresponds to Yitzchak; green signifying the midah of tiferes corresponds to Yaakov. Now, in the curses—the "tochachah"—in parshas Bechukosai, it is written (Vayikra 26, 42): **וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם: "I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land.** This implies that HKB"H promised to protect Yisrael because of the covenant that He established with the three holy Patriarchs. This then is the significance of the bow as the sign of the covenant. Even when "din" prevails in the world, chas v'shalom, HKB"H remembers His covenant with the three Avos, alluded to by the three colors of the rainbow.

This is the message conveyed by HKB"H's declaration: **"I have placed My rainbow in the cloud."** He specifies **"My rainbow,"** that has the three colors representing the three Avos; for they are My portion and My destiny. **"And it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth"—**just as I entered into a covenant with the holy Avos. **"And it shall happen, when I cloud the earth with a cloud"—**when I consider bringing darkness and devastation to the world; **"the bow will be seen in the cloud"—**reminding Me of the merit of the Avos, for whose sake the world deserves to be spared from annihilation.

HKB"H Accepts Korbanos from Yisrael in the Merit of the Holy Avos

We can now connect two of the ideas we have discussed. Firstly, HKB"H established a covenant with the inhabitants of earth--promising that He would never bring another mabul to the world—in the merit of the pleasing aroma from the korbanos offered by Noah. Secondly, we learned from the Zohar that the sign of the covenant of the rainbow alludes to the holy Avos.

In Toras HaOlah (Part 2, Chapter 7), the Rama writes that HKB"H accepts korbanos from Yisrael solely in the merit of the holy Avos. He substantiates this assertion by referring to the offerings of the princes at the inauguration of the mizbeiach (Bamidbar 7, 21): **פֶּר אֶחָד בֶּן בָּקָר אֵיל אֶחָד כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד: "one young bull, one ram, one sheep in its first year for an "olah."** Based on the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 14, 5), Rashi explains that the bull corresponds to Avraham, the ram corresponds to Yitzchak and the sheep corresponds to Yaakov.

We can now appreciate how the two rationales for not bringing another mabul to the world—the korbanos offered by Noah and the sign of the rainbow alluding to the holy Avos--align with each other magnificently. In the merit of the Avos, HKB"H accepts korbanos; the smoke that rises from them blazes a path through the clouds formed by iniquities; through this path, HKB"H illuminates and provides sustenance to the world.

Tefilos which Were Instituted by the Avos Function like the Rainbow Killing the Prosecutors

Continuing onward on this majestic path, we will now focus on the Ramban's comment that the bow is only a sign of the covenant when it faces upwards. Let us refer to the Gemara (Berachos 26b): **אֵיתָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא אָמַר תְּפִלוֹת כִּנְגַד תְּמִידִין תִּיקְנוּם. תְּנִיָּא אַבּוֹת תִּיקְנוּם, רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לׁוֹי אָמַר תְּפִלוֹת כִּנְגַד תְּמִידִין תִּיקְנוּם. תְּנִיָּא כּוּוֹתִיָּה דְרַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא, וְתִנִּיָּא כּוּוֹתִיָּה דְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לׁוֹי.** One opinion holds that the tefilos were instituted by the Avos; the other opinion states that they correspond to the Tamid offerings. The Gemara concludes that both opinions are correct and valid. In truth, the Avos instituted the tefilos to correspond with the Tamid offerings, because they foresaw

via their “ruach hakodesh” that Yisrael were destined to offer korbanos.

Based on this understanding, we can deduce an important principle. During the time of the Beis HaMikdash, Yisrael were able to blaze a path bursting through the clouds formed by their iniquities by means of the smoke rising from their korbanos. In similar fashion, even today, when we no longer have a Beis HaMikdash, due to our countless sins and iniquities, we are still able to blaze a path through the clouds of iniquity. For, the vapors exuding from our enthusiastic, fiery tefilos—which correspond to the korbanos and function in their place—act like the smoke produced by the fire of the korban. As a result, our tefilos ascend and are received with mercy and goodwill by the Master of the Universe.

Now, we find that tefilah is compared both to a sword and to a bow. Before passing away, Yaakov Avinu says to Yosef (Bereishis 48, 22): “ואני נתתי לך שכבם אחד על אחיך אשר לקחתי מיד” -- **and I have given you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from hand of the**

Emori with my sword and with my bow. Targum Onkelos interprets “with my sword and with my bow” as “with my prayer and my supplication.” The Binah L’Itim (62) explains that a sword is designed to kill an enemy up close; whereas a bow is designed to kill an enemy at a distance. Similarly, tefilah is well-suited to function like a sword to kill the yetzer hara, the enemy nearby in one’s heart; it also functions like a bow to kill the prosecutor who presents its accusations up in the heavens.

This enlightens us with regards to the symbolism of the sign of the covenant being a bow aimed upwards toward the heavens. It alludes to the fact that even when the Beis HaMikdash no longer stands, and the smoke of korbanos no longer blazes a path through the clouds of iniquity; nevertheless, in the merit of the tefilos instituted by the holy Avos, functioning like a bow--able to kill the prosecutors from a distance—they, too, burst through the clouds of iniquity like the smoke of the korbanos. Through the path they blaze, Yisrael’s tefilos ascend to their Father in Heaven; and through this path, HKB”H provides them with abundant good.

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