

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT BEREISHIT

"And Chanokh Walked with the Lord"

By Rav Amnon Bazak

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the various personalities appearing in parashat Bereishit, Chanokh the son of Yered merits only a very brief description, providing few details and leaving much unsaid. All the information we have about Chanokh is compressed into the following four verses:

"Chanokh lived sixty-five years, and he begot Metushelach. AND CHANOKH WALKED WITH THE LORD after begetting Metushelach for three hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Chanokh were three hundred and sixty five years. AND CHANOKH WALKED WITH THE LORD, AND WAS NO MORE, FOR THE LORD TOOK HIM." (Bereishit 5:21-24)

Two elements stand out here as exceptions to the fixed formula listing the ten generations from Adam until Noach. Firstly, instead of the usual "And X lived Y years after begetting Z, and he begot sons and daughters," we are told here: "AND CHANOKH WALKED WITH THE LORD after begetting Metushelach." Secondly, instead of the usual conclusion – "And all the years of X were Y years, AND HE DIED," there is no mention of death when it comes to Chanokh. Rather, the Torah repeats, "And Chanokh walked with the Lord," with an addition: "And he was no more, for the Lord took him".

Clearly, then, Chanokh is someone special. However, the text is opaque: what is the meaning of the expression, "And he was no more, for the Lord took him"? Why did God take him? Why was Chanokh's life so short, relative to the other generations of that time? In general, what is the significance of this brief parasha?

B. EVALUATION OF CHANOKH'S CHARACTER

Chanokh was unquestionably a positive character, for we are told explicitly – "And Chanokh walked with the Lord." Another expression of the positive attitude of the text towards him may perhaps be found in the fact that Chanokh is the SEVENTH generation from Adam, as noted by the midrash:

"Everything that is the 'seventh' is beloved... In the listing of the generations, the seventh is beloved: Adam, Shet, Enosh, Keinan, Mehalalel, Yered, CHANOKH – 'And Chanokh walked with the Lord' (Bereishit 5:24); concerning the forefathers, the seventh was beloved: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Levi, Kehat, Amram, MOSHE – 'And Moshe ascended to the Lord' (Shemot 19:3)." (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, parasha 23)

There may also be positive symbolism in the number of years of his life. Three hundred and sixty five is the number of days of the year; hence, it is a number that signifies completion.

However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Chanokh's lifespan is much shorter – less than half as long, in fact – than the lives of the generations that preceded and that followed him, especially his father and his son. In Tanakh we generally find that the number of years of a person's life is directly linked to his behavior. The reward for fulfillment of mitzvot is long life ("I shall fill the number of your days" – Shemot 23:26, and elsewhere), while a shorter lifespan is evidence of Divine punishment ("Nor shall there ever be an elderly man of your household" – Shemuel I 2:32, and elsewhere). What, then, is the meaning of this apparent contradiction in the description of Chanokh's character?

In the teachings of Chazal and in biblical commentaries, we find different evaluations of Chanokh. Some see the positive aspects as the central expression of his personality, and interpret the fact of his being taken at a young age in a positive light. I mentioned above the midrash concerning the special Divine love for the "seventh," and this idea is echoed elsewhere:

"And he was no more, for the Lord took him' – because he was a righteous man, the Holy One took him from among mortals and made him an angel; he became Metatron." (Midrash Aggada [Buber], Bereishit 5:24 (

Ralbag follows the same line:

"Behold, for this same reason he is not mentioned as having died, while the other people mentioned with him are noted as having died: to indicate the difference between him and them. FOR HE PERFECTED HIS SOUL AND ACHIEVED ITS PERFECTION, while all the others died without achieving this".

In contrast, others appear to regard his relatively short life as clear expression of a negative judgment of him:

"R. Chama bar Hoshaya said: He is not recorded in the register of the righteous, but rather in the register of the wicked." (Bereishit Rabba 25:1(

A balanced approach, apparently based upon the different aspects highlighted in the verses, depicts Chanokh as a complex character, with both positive and negative traits:

"Rabbi Aibu taught: Chanokh was fickle; sometimes righteous and at other times wicked. The Holy One said: While he is righteous I shall take him." (ibid(.

This approach is adopted by Rashi:

"And Chanokh walked' – He was righteous, but it would be easy for him to revert to his [previous] evil ways; therefore the Holy One brought forward the time of his death. This is the reason for the repetitious description of his death: 'He was no more' – in the world for the [natural] length of his life, 'for the Lord took him' – before his time".

As mentioned, this approach is clearly substantiated by the facts of the verses, but it still presents a difficulty: nowhere in the verses is there any mention of Chanokh's wickedness. For this reason, it seems, there is indeed room to regard Chanokh as a complex character, but not necessarily as one including sin and evil.

C. ADAM, CHANOKH, NOACH AND AVRAHAM

Chanokh seems to stand, alongside Adam, Noach and Avraham, as one of the four central characters of the beginning of Sefer Bereishit. What is common to all four is the issue of man's place as part of humanity, in his posture before God. There is a development among the four personalities, which I shall describe here very briefly.

Adam is born outside the Garden, but is later placed there: "The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to preserve it" (Bereishit 2:15). At first Adam is created alone, but thereafter he is provided with a "helper facing him." After his sin, he loses the right and the ability to live in God's garden. He is no longer able to walk about in the Garden of Eden, because of his fear of God: "They heard the voice of the Lord God WALKING ABOUT in the garden in the breeze of the day, and Adam and his wife hid from God the Lord" (3:8). For this reason, he is returned to his original place: "The Lord God sent him out of the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence HE WAS TAKEN" (3:23). In his new-old location, Adam is once again required to "work" – but his work will no longer be in God's garden.

Concerning Chanokh, the seventh generation from Adam, we find no mention of sin, but there is likewise no mention of work. The expression that appears twice – "And Chanokh walked with the Lord" – arouses a dual connotation. On the one hand, while Adam feared God Who "walked about" in the garden, Chanokh walks "with" God. On the other hand, this special expression – "walked with God" – connotes an upright posture before God, with no regard for one's surroundings. Adam, prior to the sin, is taken to a tangible reality, where he is commanded to live a tangible life: "to work it and to preserve it." Chanokh, in contrast, is taken from a tangible reality to a metaphysical one, whose precise nature is unclear. This fact indicates that the "taking" is not entirely positive:

"Chanokh sought to refine himself to walk with the Lord; for this reason he distanced himself from the masses – either out of fear, or out of disdain. But seclusion and isolation are not the Jewish way. Our pious and righteous people lived among the masses, with the masses and for the benefit of the masses; they regarded it as their mission to elevate the masses towards themselves." (Commentary of Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch, Bereishit 5)

An interesting expression with regard to this issue is to be found in the midrash:

"R. Aibu said: [He was taken] on Rosh Ha-Shanah; he was judged at the same time as all the world was judged." (Bereishit Rabba 25:1)

The attempt to isolate oneself from society and to stand alone before God cannot succeed. No matter how much a person may "walk with God," ultimately he stands in judgment together with the rest of humanity.

Only one other person is recorded as having "walked with God" – Noach. Concerning Noach, the text says even more:

"Noach was a righteous man; he was just in his generation. Noach walked with the Lord." (Bereishit 6:9)

The fact that Noach was a "righteous man... just in his generation" tells us that he was socially involved. At the same time, Noach walks "with the Lord;" where his Divine service is concerned, he does not invite the general public to join him. Noach also fails to beg for Divine mercy for his generation. It is from here, apparently, that Chazal's criticism of Noach arises, as expressed in Rashi's famous quote of the dispute among the Amoraim (Sanhedrin 108b:(

"'Just in his generation' - Some of our Sages interpreted the text in his favor: how much greater a righteous person he would have been had he lived in a generation of righteous people! Others interpret the text as criticizing him: in his [wicked] generation, he was considered righteous; had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been considered special in any way".

More specifically, the Zohar (Bereishit 67b) teaches:

"What is the difference between Moshe and other mortals? At the time when the Holy One said to Moshe, 'Now leave Me... and I shall make you into a great nation...' (Shemot 32:10), Moshe immediately said: 'Shall I then abandon Israel's sentence for my own benefit?' ... Noach, when the Holy One told him ... that he and his sons would be saved, did not ask for mercy for the world, and it was destroyed. Therefore the Flood is named after him, as it is written (Yishayahu 54:9), 'For this is like the waters of Noach to Me; just as I have sworn that the waters of Noach will no longer cover the earth'....

For this reason Noach, too, was taken – but because he was more connected to the world, he was not taken to a reality that was removed from the world, but rather into the ark. While he was in the ark, the world was destroyed – a fact for which the Zohar, to some extent, holds Noach responsible. But Noach was destined to return to reality, after the Flood, and to begin a new dynasty of generations up until Avraham Avinu.

Indeed, with Avraham the cycle is completed. Like Adam, Avraham is also born outside of God's inheritance, and he is brought to it by God's command:

"I took your forefather Avraham from the other side of the river, and I led him through all the land of Canaan." (Yehoshua 24:3)

But, unlike Adam, Avraham did not violate the conditions of his dwelling in God's inheritance, and unlike Chanokh and Noach, he did not suffice with walking WITH God, disconnected from the society around him. Avraham calls out in God's Name, he acts in the name of righteousness ("tzdek") and receives the blessing of Malkitzedek, he rebukes Avimelekh on the basis of righteousness and justice, etc. The most blatant difference between him and Noach finds expression, obviously, in his argument with God, when he attempts to save Sedom, in contrast to Noach's disregard for the fate of his world.

For our purposes, it is especially important to note the expression used in connection with Avraham:

"[God] said to him: I am E-l Sha-dai, WALK BEFORE ME and be perfect." (Bereishit 17:1)

Later on, Avraham's servant testifies, quite innocently, that his master Avraham has fulfilled this Divine command:

]“Avraham] said to me: God, BEFORE WHOM I HAVE WALKED, will send His angel with you...” (Bereishit 24:40)

Likewise, Yaakov tells Yosef:

“The Lord BEFORE WHOM my fathers – Avraham and Yitzchak – walked; the Lord Who has been my shepherd from the beginning until this day...” (Bereishit 48:15)

Chazal noted this difference in the language that the text uses concerning Chanokh and Noah, as opposed to the language used with regard to Avraham:

“Noach walked with the Lord’ – R. Yuda said: [This may be compared to] a king who had two sons, an elder one and a younger one. To the younger one, he said, ‘Walk with me,’ while to the elder one he said, ‘Walk before me.’ Likewise, Avraham, who was greater, was told, ‘Walk before Me’ (Bereishit 17:1); concerning Noah, who was not as great, we read: ‘Noach walked with the Lord.’” (Bereishit Rabba 30)

It seems, then, that the difference between them arises not only from their respective levels of spiritual power. The significance of the expression, “to walk before God,” is walking in the world, among people, and specifically from amidst this social involvement – to walk BEFORE GOD.

I noted the development in the four central characters of the beginning of Sefer Bereishit. Adam was taken to the Garden of Eden, but he did not fulfill God's command there. Therefore, he was forced to hide from God Who “was walking about in the garden” and was ultimately expelled. Chanokh did walk with God, but was not involved with his surroundings; therefore, he was taken from the world before his time. Noah, too, walked with God without being involved with the world around him, but he acted with righteousness and justice, and therefore was taken only temporarily to a tangible reality so that he could ultimately emerge from it and establish the foundations of a new society. Avraham was the first who showed the way for the forefathers and their descendants: he walked before God, to show those around him the way of God, and to establish a nation that calls out in God's Name.

)Translated by Kaeren Fish(