

# #Me Too- Noach and the Lessons Not Learnt

Noah 5782/2021

The 2019 Impact Report of the international #MeToo organisation tells the origin of the organisation and global movement. In 2017, two words sent shockwaves throughout the world as the hashtag #MeToo went viral in less than 24 hours. Individuals, leaning on the power of community, found the courage to come forward with their experiences of sexual violence. More than 12 million in the first 24 hours, and over 19 million in the first year<sup>1</sup>.

Many social commentators have described their experiences, and others have tried to offer specific solutions including those with a religious Jewish lens. I do not want to posit on solutions to the problems, rather I would like to look at the problem through the lens of the story of the mabul, the flood, with the goal of realising that we have missed the powerful lessons that this story teaches us.

When looking at the story of Noach, most people neglect to look at the final lines of the Torah's first Parasha, Bereshit, which explains the beginning of mankind's downfall, with the Bnei Elohim, the sons of God being instrumental to the verses<sup>2</sup>. Our sages provide different answers as to what these Bnei Elohim could be;

- a) Angels who have corrupted themselves either before the creation of man, after spending time on earth, or perhaps both<sup>3</sup>
- b) That these were rulers or princes<sup>4</sup>
- c) Finally that these were judges or people of authority who debased themselves<sup>5</sup>

And with their crimes, suddenly the world is threatened with destruction. God looks at the very best, the top echelons of society, the people who were meant to provide moral clarity, and he sees people who have been the first to dangerously corrupt themselves thereby leading to a corruption of society.

Our sages explained that there were a host of sexually motivated travesties, whereby those with power were utilising it for their own sexual glorification. The Midrash explains this corruption in greater detail. There was such a rise of people abusing their powers, who were utilising their positions, their wealth, their authority, and they were getting away with anything and everything, and this trickled down to the populace.

Thus we can return back to the movement started in 2017 which finally reacted to the very situation us men had created. Where powerful people, from presidents and prime ministers, to industry bosses, to great artists, have used their social capital, their very real power, to seduce, assault, and harass women, many of whom were lacking in equal power, to fulfil their own sexual glorification.

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<sup>1</sup> See Source Six in the Modern Page of Talmud Noah 5782

<sup>2</sup> See Source One in the Modern Page of Talmud Noah 5782

<sup>3</sup> See Source Two in the Modern Page of Talmud Noah 5782

<sup>4</sup> See Source Three in the Modern Page of Talmud Noah 5782

<sup>5</sup> See Source Four in the Modern Page of Talmud Noah 5782

This too has trickled down to the populace, whereby boys and men, feel that it is now normal to catcall, or whistle, or touch, or grab, or assault women, where we see that abuse has become commonplace, where we have a rape culture, that first ascribes blame to the victims of assault before looking to the problems of the perpetrator. Some may be done in jest, some will be done to thinking there is mutual consent, and others will be done in a way that is calculated and planned. Yet all of it is wrong.

We must learn from the mistakes of the generation of Noach, the Dor haMabul. We must realise what we have created, we must open this conversation, and ensure that we are able to create a culture whereby women can feel safe to walk in the street without fear of harassment, comments, or attacks. We must create a world whereby one fifth of the women in our society do not have to fear being raped or sexually assaulted. We must create a world that maintains equality and security as the highest pillar of ethics. We must realise the mistakes of the generations past and amend our reality to ensure that we do not meet the same end of anarchy and the crumbling of society.