
***#MeToo and the
lessons not
learnt***

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

*A Modern Page of
Talmud –
Noah 5782*



When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.— The LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.” **Bereshit 6:1-3**¹ The first is that these Bnei Elohim, the sons of God, refer to the rulers and princes. The second is that these were princely angels who came as messengers from God: they, too, intermingled with them (the daughters of men). **Rashi on Bereshit 6:2**² These Bnei Elohim refer to the elite of the society in those days, the law enforcers and judges. The Torah informs us that the very people charged with maintaining the functioning of an orderly, law abiding society, were the first to take the law into their own hands whenever it suited their purpose. Abuse of power leads to anarchy. **Tur haAruch on Bereshit 6:2**³ The explanations offered that the Torah refers to Uzza and Uziel are very far fetched. The two aforementioned are supposed to have been angels who had voted against the creation of man and who belittled man’s effort to conquer the evil urge. They were supposedly punished by being consigned to earth to experience life on earth by themselves. Instead of proving their superiority, they were the first to succumb to the allurements of physically attractive females. Their request to return to the celestial regions was denied by God. **Radak on Bereshit 6:2**⁴ When the daughters of the world were being made to

I am about to destroy
them with the earth.
וְהִנְנִי מְשַׁחִיתִם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
Bereshit 6:13

appear “good” in order to stand beneath the marriage canopy one of the lords would come and carry her off first. **Midrash Rabah 26:5**⁵ 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. **MeToo 2019 Impact Report**⁶ People talk about #MeToo in terms of patriarchy, of power and sexuality. But these are actually outgrowths of a deeper, more profound problem, and that is objectification of another human being - turning someone from a three-dimensional subject with needs, wants, and feelings, into an instrument for my use. What Immanuel Kant called “treating humanity as only a means rather than an end-in-itself.” In situations of sexual harassment or assault, this line is crossed. We instrumentalize people for our own needs, whether sexual or power gratification. And it’s tricky line to tow precisely because people do actually serve one another’s needs and desires. But how do we stop objectifying each other? We all know that this is a problem, but even as we know it, we fail at it. **Elana Stein Hain in Gender, Sexuality and Derekh Eretz: A #MeToo Midrash**⁷