

Parashat Bereishit: Remembering to Forget

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Bereishit 8:1	
<p>וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל־הַחַיָּה וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּיבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם:</p>	<p>God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided.</p>

1. Since When Does God Forget?

Rashi on Bereishit 8:1	
<p>ויזכור אלהים. זה השם מדת הדין הוא, ונהפכה למדת רחמים על ידי תפלת הצדיקים; ורשעתן של רשעים הופכת מדת רחמים למדת הדין, שנאמר וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם, וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אִמְחָהּ, (ברא' ו') וְהוּא שֵׁם מִדַּת רַחֲמִים:</p>	<p>ויזכור אלהים — This Divine Name really signifies the God of Strict Justice but it is transformed into Divine Mercy through the prayers of the righteous, whilst the evil practised by wicked people transforms Divine Mercy into Strict Justice, as it is said (Genesis 6:5) “And the Lord (ה') saw that the wickedness of man was great” and (Genesis 5:7) “And the Lord (ה') said, “I will blot out etc.”— yet in these passages the Name (ה') is <i>מדת רחמים</i>, that signifying Divine Mercy (Genesis Rabbah 33:3)..</p>

Ramban on Bereishit 8:1	
<p>ויזכור אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה הזכירה בנח מפני שהיה צדיק תמים וקרת לו ברית להצילו, ונח יכלל זרעו אשר אתו שם, ולא הזכירם כי בזכותו נצולו. אבל הזכירה שאמר בחיה ובבהמה אינה בזכות, שאין בבעלי נפש זכות או חובה, זולתי באדם לבדו. אבל הזכירה בהם כי זכר את דבר קדשו שאמר והיה העולם, והרצון אשר לו בבריאת העולם עלה לפניו, ורצה בקיום העולם במיניו אשר ברא בו. והנה ראה עתה להוציאם שלא יכלו בתבה. ולא הזכיר העוף והשרץ כי זכירת החיה שזה עמם, ויגיד עליו רעו:</p>	<p>ויזכור אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה — The remembrance of Noah was because he was a perfectly righteous man, and He had made a covenant with him to save him. The word “Noah” here includes his children that were there with him. Scripture did not mention them specifically, though, for they were saved by his merit. However, the remembrance stated concerning beast and cattle was not on account of merit, for among living creatures there is no merit or guilt save in man alone. But the remembrance concerning them was <i>Because He remembered His holy word</i> which He had spoken, causing the world to come into existence, and the Will which was before Him at the creation of the world arose before Him and He desired the existence of the world with all the species that He created therein. Thus He now saw fit to bring them forth so that they should not perish in the ark. Scripture does not mention the fowl and the creeping things for the remembrance of <i>the living thing</i> is similar to their remembrance, and <i>the companion thereof telleth concerning it</i>.</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Or Ha-Hayyim on Bereishit 8:1	
<p>וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ וְגֹי'. טַעַם שֶׁלֹּא הִסְפִּיק זְכוּרָתוֹ שֶׁל נֹחַ וְהוֹסִיף לִזְכֹּר וְאֵת כָּל הַחַיָּה, אֲדַלֵּי כִי לְהוֹדִיעַ בָּא גַם כִּי לְצַד הַחַיָּה וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵתוֹ לִבְדּוֹ יִסְפִּיק לְזָכֵר, וּפְרוֹשׁ הַדְּבָרִים בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא זֶה אִם זֶה.</p>	<p>God remembered Noah. The reason the Torah was not content to mention that God remembered Noah but added that He remembered all the beasts that were in the ark with him may have been that the animals by themselves already warranted that God should remember them.</p>
<p>עוֹד יִרְצֶה עַל זֶה הַדְּרָךְ: וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ – גַּם זְכֹר כָּל הַטּוֹרַח וְהָעוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו מִהַבְּהֵמָה וְהַחַיָּה וְגו' אֲשֶׁר אֵתוֹ בִּתְבֵּה וְחִמַּל עָלָיו. גַּם בְּזֶה כָּלֵל רִמְזָה לְצַרָּה שֶׁמִּצָּאָתוֹ לְנֹחַ (תְּנַחֲמוּם) מֵאֲרִי אֲשֶׁר הִכִּישׁוּ וְנִסְתַּכֵּן בִּתְבֵּה לְרֹב תּוֹסֶפֶת טְרֵדָתוֹ וְכו'. גַּם מְנִיעֵת רְפוּאָה לְמַחֲלָתוֹ, נִמְצָאֵת אֹמֵר כִּי עֶקֶר הַזְכָּרוֹן הוּא לְנֹחַ.</p>	<p>Another reason is that the Torah includes in that statement that God considered all the hard and menial work Noah was subjected to in looking after all the animals under his care. God had pity on Noah. The Torah wanted to emphasise that God's major concern was Noah and not the animals.</p>

Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi) on Bereishit 8:1	
<p>וַיִּזְכֹּר, אֵין שִׁכְחָה וְאֵין זְכוּרָה לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ, כִּי לִשְׁוֹן זְכוּרָה הוּא אַחֵר הַשִּׁכְחָה, אֵלֹא דְבָרָה תּוֹרָה בְּלִשְׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם לְהַבִּין הַשְׁוֹמְעִים, וְכֵן "וַיִּזְכְּרֵנִי לְהֵם בְּרִית רַאשֵׁינִים" (וַיִּקְרָא כ"ו:מ"ה) "וַיִּזְכְּרֵנִי אֶת בְּרִית יַעֲקֹב (שֵׁם) וְהִדּוּמִים לְהֵם. וְרָאָה כִּי דִי לְהֵם סְבוּל הַצֶּעַר הַגָּדוֹל בִּתְבֵּה, וְרָאָה שֶׁלֹּא יֵאָרִיךְ לְהֵם עוֹד תִּגְבֹּרֶת הַמַּיִם אֵלֹא יִחְסְרוּ מִכָּאן וְאֵילֶךְ כְּמוֹ שֶׁגִּבְרוּ.</p>	<p>וַיִּזְכֹּר, There is no forgetting and no remembering before the Blessed One, for the term <i>remembrance</i> only applies after something has been forgotten. Rather, the Torah speaks in human language so that people can understand. Thus it says, "And I will remember for them the covenant of the first ones" (Vayikra 26:45), "And I will remember My covenant with Jacob" (ibid.), and similar verses. And [the meaning here is that] God saw that the creatures had already suffered enough from the great distress in the ark, and He saw that He would no longer prolong for them the overpowering of the waters — instead, from this point onward the waters would begin to diminish, just as they had previously increased.</p>

2. Remembering to Forget

Blessing Upon Seeing a Rainbow	
<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, זֹכֵר הַבְּרִית נֶאֱמָן בְּבְרִיתוֹ וְקִיָּם בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ:</p>	<p>Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who remembers the covenant, is faithful with [God's] covenant, and is steady with [God's] word.</p>

Professor Marc Tzvi Brettler, "Zichronot: Asking an Omniscient God to Remember," TheTorah.com	
<p>This image of a forgetting God or a God that overlooks our faults is helpful...where we are asked to take stock, to take repentance seriously. After all—who can repent if we imagine an all-remembering objective deity? What's the point? We might repent successfully, but can God truly "forget" and neglect the wrong things that we have done in the previous year, and totally erase them from the divine memory?</p>	
<p>Big Question: Do any of these explanations about God "remembering" resonate with you? Do any of them bother you? Explain your answer.</p>	