

## Lesson 5: Noah's Nakedness

**Time needed:** 45 minutes

**Recommended age range:** Adults

**Objectives:**

- Participants will explore an early rabbinic reading of Genesis that highlights the rabbi's approach to male homosexual relations
- Participants will explore themes of power and powerlessness

**Materials:** Copies of the text, one per each pair of students



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## Lesson 5, Text Study 1

### Genesis 9:20-25

He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said. "Cursed be Canaan the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers."

בראשית פרק ט

(כ) ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם: (כא) וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה: (כב) וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחוץ: (כג) ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה וישימו על שכם שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם אחרנית וערות אביהם לא ראו: (כד) וייקץ נח מיינו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן: (כה) ויאמר ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה אחיו: (כה) ויאמר ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו:

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Consider what Noah has just survived. Why do you think that Noah got drunk? Why do you think he removes his clothing?
- 2 What are the meanings of nakedness?
- 3 What does Ham see when he enters the tent? What does he say to his brothers outside the tent?
- 4 What do you make of Shem and Japheth's choice to turn their faces away from their father's nakedness?
- 5 What exactly did Ham do to Noah? Earlier, the text says that Ham "saw" Noah. Is seeing something we "do" to someone?
- 6 Why is Canaan punished for something Ham did?

## Lesson 5, Text Study 2

### Ibn Ezra on 9:24

The verse does not say what was done, but the perpetrator was Canaan.

אבן עזרא בראשית פרק ט פסוק כד  
(כד) וייקץ נח הכתוב לא גילה מה נעשה. והעושה היה כנען

### *Discussion Questions:*

- 1 Our biblical text is obviously hiding something. What might that be?
- 2 According to Ibn Ezra, what's being hidden is that Canaan "did something" to Noah. What do you make of this interpretation?



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## Lesson 5, Text Study 3

### Sanhedrin 70a

“And Ham saw”: Rav and Shmuel (disagreed). One said he castrated him and the other said he raped him. The one who claims that he castrated him explains in this way; that Ham thus prevented Noah from having a fourth son, which is why Ham’s fourth son, Canaan, is cursed. The other claims he raped him by a comparison of expressions. Here it is written, “And Ham, the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father” and there (Genesis 34:2) “And Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her (Dina) and took her and lay with her by force.”

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ע עמוד א  
ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלו וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחוץ ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה וישימו על שכמ שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם וגו' וייקץ נח מיינו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן. רב ושמואל, חד אמר: סרסו, וחד אמר: רבעו. מאן דאמר סרסו - מתוך שקלקלו ברביעי קללו ברביעי. ומאן דאמר רבעו - גמר וירא וירא, כתיב הכא וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו וכתיב התם +בראשית ל"ד+ וירא אותה שכמ בן חמור וגו'.

### Discussion Questions

The Gemara has a different view on what the biblical text is hiding. This interpretation claims that Ham is a perpetrator of two possible actions.

- 1 What could be Ham’s motivation for such actions? If Ham were to debase his father, what power over his brothers might this gain him?
- 2 What are the distinctions between the actions described above (castration and rape)? What are the similarities?
- 3 The biblical text leaves us with two basic questions: What was done, and who did it? We’ve seen how Ibn Ezra answers these questions. How do Rav and Samuel of the Sanhedrin text answer these two questions?
- 4 Taken together, what do you make of the rabbinic response to the biblical text?

*This text study was created by Rabbi Steve Greenberg for Keshet. We encourage you to download this resource and share it with others, as long as you credit Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Keshet.*



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