

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת נח

אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו את האלקים התהלך נח
“These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations, Noach walked with Hashem” (6:9)

Rashi asks: Why does the posuk begin with the introduction that “these are the offspring of Noach” but then begin with a description of Noach’s piety before proceeding with the list of his offspring? Rashi answers with the statement of Chazal that the main offspring of righteous people are their good deeds. This is the legacy of Noach and these, his good deeds, are the most important things that he created. The reason why righteous acts are the most important part of Noach’s personality is because every person has the ability to write his own destiny. Noach chose to do the right thing and therefore he became the righteous Noach that we read about.

Every individual should recognize that he has within himself the ability to achieve great things, but it is up to him to make it happen. A person will only grow and accomplish great things if he makes a conscious choice to make it happen. When he does so, the effort that made it happen is recognized as his main contribution to the world and as something that he created.

The next posuk says that Noach had three children: Shem, Cham and Yefes. Why does the Torah say that Noach had three children? After all, one could just count the names at the end of the posuk to discover that there were three of them.

The Gemara in the sixth chapter of Yoma asks the same question regarding the two goats that were used in the Yom Kippur service. The Torah says that there were two goats and then explains that there was one goat that was brought as a sacrifice and one that was sent to Azazel. Why, asks the Gemara, do we need this number to be specified? The answer is that the Torah is teaching the requirement for the two goats to be exactly the same in every possible way – in value, appearance and characteristics.

R' Dovid Feinstein says that the same applies here as well. In a sense, Shem, Cham and Yefes were triplets. Even though they were born separately, they all had inherited the ability to perfect themselves from their father, Noach. They all possessed the same abilities and each one had the capacity to do great things. It was no easier for any one of the brothers to become righteous than the other two. However, only Shem utilized these abilities to the fullest and took up the mantle of his father as the spiritual leader of the world. While it is usually the case that a person's children have different talents and abilities, in this case they were all alike in their talents and abilities. But at the end of the day, it remained up to them to decide which way to go and only Shem grabbed a hold of the opportunity that his genetic makeup gave to him.

וימח את כל היקום אשר על פני האדמה מאדם עד בהמה עד רמש ועד עוף השמים
וימחו מן הארץ וישאר אך נח ואשר אתו בתבה

“And He blotted out all existence that was on the face of the ground – from man to animals to creeping things and in the bird of the heavens; and they were blotted out from the earth – only Noach survived and those with him in the ark” (7:23)

The Midrash Tanchuma says that for the entire year, Noach and his children did not sleep because they constantly had to provide food for the animals in the תיבה. One time he brought food to the lion a bit late and it attacked him. The lion injured Noach so badly that he was lame for the rest of his life.

R' Yitzchak Hutner said: It seems cruel that the lion should attack Noach. He sees that Noach is working day and night without sleep to ensure that all creatures on board the תיבה are in good health. So what if he came a little late this one time? R' Hutner explained that this was not an ordinary occurrence of coming late which could be excused. This was the only lion of its gender left in the world. If he is not provided for properly, it is possible that he will die and his species will become extinct. This is an emergency situation and, as such, every single meal must be delivered on time because there is no margin for error with the last lion.

This is the approach that we must take with regard to the secular Jews with whom we come into contact. Unfortunately, many young secular Jewish men marry non-Jewish women and, when that happens, there will be no more Jews from that family ever again. A line in the Jewish nation ceases to exist. We should view these Jews in the same way that Noach was meant to tend to the lion, understanding that they are potentially the last of their kind. Just as the last lion should be treated in a different way because of his position in the world, we have to be extra careful to utilize every opportunity to guide these young people and inspire them. We must adopt this approach if we hope to succeed in prevent them and their children from becoming extinct to the Jewish nation.

צא מן התבה אתה ואשתך ובניך ונשי בניך אתך

“Go forth from the ark: you and your wife, your sons and your sons’ wives with you” (8:16)

Although Noach knew that the earth had become dry, he remained in the תיבה until Hashem instructed him to leave. Why did he need to wait for the Hashem to give him the “all clear” before exiting the תיבה?

The Malbim writes that Noach’s actions give us an insight into the purpose of the תיבה. After all, why did Hashem need to put Noach into a תיבה in the first place? The תיבה survived the pounding of the rain and the raging waters in a miraculous fashion. Once Hashem was saving him with miracles, would it have been any different if Hashem had just placed Noach on some remote island and ensured that the island remained unaffected by the floodwaters? What we see is that Noach had to be in the water because destruction was decreed upon all inhabitants of the land, Noach included. In order to protect Noach, Hashem told him to enter the תיבה where he would be considered a water creature rather than a land creature. In this way, he would not be subject to the destruction of the flood, just as the fish survived. Noach, knowing this, did not want to leave the תיבה and step on dry land until he knew for certain that the decree of destruction for all inhabitants of the land had been lifted. He was afraid that, should he return to the land too early, he would lose his special protective water creature status and revert to the status of land inhabitant, in which case he would once again be subject to

the decree that was still in effect. Therefore, even though he knew that the land was inhabitable once again, Noach stayed in the תיבה until he received the word from Hashem that the flood was over and that it was safe to return.

וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה

“He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent” (9:21)

R’ Shimon Schwab asks: How could it be that Noach could get drunk, undress himself and then shortly thereafter be on the high spiritual level necessary to receive a prophecy? Furthermore, what is meant by the designation of Noach as a “man of the earth”?

R’ Schwab answers that Noach mistakenly believed that, in the aftermath of the flood, the world had returned to its original pristine state as in the time of creation. He thought that there was no evil inclination once again, just as the world had been for Adam and Chava before they sinned. He viewed himself as the new Adam, a “man of the earth,” just as Adam had been created from the earth itself and was named for this source of his existence. He decided to plant a vineyard and make wine to atone for the sin of Adam and Chava, who had consumed forbidden grapes when they were living in such circumstances (according to the opinion in the Gemara which holds that the עץ הדעת was a grapevine). In his drunken state, he removed his clothing in another attempt to hearken back to the days before sin stained mankind. Nevertheless, despite his good intentions, Noach was mistaken. The evil inclination did exist and Cham’s action bore that out. Noach was horribly degraded. However, his intentions were noble and he was still a great man. So great, in fact, that he was still at the level where he merited to receive prophecy from Hashem. This understanding of the pesukim enables us to resolve the apparent contradiction in Noach’s actions.