

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 points out that the parsha begins by introducing Noach's offspring and then states that Noach was a righteous man. Only afterwards does the Torah list his children. This teaches us that the most important "offspring" of a person are his good deeds. Rabbi Friedman adds that this idea is hinted to in the posuk itself. The introductory word "these" implies that specifically what follows is Noach's offspring. The true fruit, the main product, of Noach was his good character. As one goes through life, he has to realize that good deeds are his main production and that he should focus on his growth in Torah and good deeds.

The posuk says "these are the offspring of Noach - Noach was a righteous man." Why does the posuk repeat Noach's name twice? Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the Torah is showing us that Noach's righteousness was a product of his own effort and that it was the foremost product of his life. Noach himself was a product of Noach. A person's character traits and his spiritual growth are determined by his own efforts, not by any predetermined or external forces. It is up to the person himself to make the decision about what kind of person he will become and to shape his personality. The Rambam writes that every person has the ability to be as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu.

What does it mean that Noach was a righteous man "in his generations?" One answer cited by Rashi is that Noach was a righteous man but would have been even greater had he lived in the era of Avraham Avinu. He was righteous but his growth was limited by his generation. This teaches us that we should always try to place ourselves in a situation where we can grow. Noach, as great a tzadik as he was, would have been even greater had he been in better surroundings. A person should not settle to be the best person in his area but should seek to surround himself with better people. This will help him grow on his own. It is all about the situation that one places himself in. People often decide to settle in places where Jewish life is weak in order to advance their careers. When making these decisions, one must keep in mind how his surroundings will affect him. Even if a person feels that he will be fine on his own, he could still grow even more if he is surrounded by people on a higher level.

ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס
“Now the earth had become corrupt before Hashem; and the earth had become filled with robbery” (6:11)

Rav Dovid Feinstein points out that the beginning of the posuk states that the people "had become corrupt before Hashem." They rebelled against Hashem's dominion over the world. However, one might have a misconception that despite the fact that they forsook Hashem, they still may have been good to one another.

Therefore, the posuk continues that their society was also filled with theft. One should not mistakenly assume that they were unified while rebelling against Hashem because that would be impossible. One cannot forsake his relationship with Hashem and still maintain his relationship with his fellow man. When one's fear of Hashem begins to slide, his benevolence toward other people will disappear right along with it. Sinning before Hashem leads to fighting and interpersonal problems. This is because a person's actions affect his character. When one ceases to fear Hashem and act properly, this will spill over into his personal character and his attitude to those around him. In Parshas Vayeira, Avraham explained to Avimelech that he lied about Sarah being his wife because he thought that "there is no fear of Hashem in this place and they will kill me because of my wife." Without fear of Hashem, even simple social order begins to fall apart.

וירא אלקים את הארץ והנה נשחתה כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ
“And Hashem saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth” (6:12)

Rashi comments that the phrase "all flesh" teaches us that even the animals had become corrupt. How did the animals, who have no free will, alter their natural behavioral pattern? Rabbi Friedman suggests that the answer lies in the idea that the world was created for mankind. All of creation revolves around man and all was created in order to help people serve Hashem. When a person corrupts himself, he corrupts all of creation which was created for him. When the people became morally bankrupt, their degeneration was reflected in the world around them. This is why even the animals began to act in a perverse manner. Just as we state in Shema that rainfall and nature are affected as a consequence of our actions, so too, the animals are affected by the way in which we behave. This shows us the far-reaching ramifications of our actions.

ויאמר אלקים לנח קץ כל בשר בא לפני כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם את הארץ
“Hashem said to Noah: The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth” (6:13)

The gemara in Sanhedrin 108 states that the generation of the Flood was only destroyed because of the sin of stealing. The Gemara implies that the people had committed stringent sins such as adultery, murder and idol worship. Why was stealing considered to be the worst offense? The Torah Temima attempts to answer this question based on a Rashi later in the parsha. Rashi (11:9) questions why the people who built the Tower of Bavel were scattered but not destroyed, even though they had planned to fight against Hashem, while generation of the Flood, which did not directly rebel against Hashem, was utterly destroyed. He answers that the generation of the Flood fought with each other and stole from each other, whereas the builders of the Tower of Bavel had unity and were working together harmoniously. Rashi concludes

from this that peace is great and fighting is hated by Hashem. In fact, the midrash on that posuk goes further and says that if the Jewish people would sin against Hashem while still living together peacefully, Hashem would be more tolerant. It was the infighting caused by stealing and hurting their fellow men that brought about their downfall.

עשה לך תבת עצי גפר קנים תעשה את התבה וכפרת אתה מבית ומחוץ בכפר
“Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make the ark with compartments and tar it inside and out with pitch” (6:14)

Rashi states that Hashem told Noach to spend 120 years building the teiva so that the people would have ample time to repent. When the people would ask Noach what he was building, Noach would respond that "Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to bring a great flood upon the world." This would hopefully lead the people to reconsider their evil ways. Rabbi Friedman notes that Noach used the name "Kadosh" to refer to Hashem. Perhaps this was meant to indicate to the questioner that the people were missing kedusha, sanctity, in their actions. Everything that they did was antithetical to kedusha. If they wanted to avoid their impending doom, they would have to infuse kedusha into their actions and their daily lives.

Noach spent 120 years of his life to allow for the possibility that the wicked people would repent. Hashem wanted to teach Noach the importance of teshuva. Even the remote possibility that someone would repent because of his actions was worth the 120 years of hard work. This is a lesson for people involved in outreach. Even if one is not successful in reaching out to others, he should not lose heart. Our responsibility is only to do our part and to try to reach out to people. Whether we succeed or not is out of our hands. We can never know if we will succeed or not, or even if our actions can touch a person now or only many years down the line. Our job is to try and make the effort. Noach teaches us that even if there is only a possibility to change someone, it is still important to make the effort. The Rema (Orach Chayim 608:2) states that one is required to rebuke his fellow Jew in certain situations for doing something wrong even if he knows that his rebuke will fall on deaf ears.

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