

Parshat Noah: Incredible Initiative

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Parshat Noah records the incredible survival of the world after the flood through the righteous Noah, his three sons and their wives. The end of the *parsha*, however, is anticlimactic. Noah plants a vineyard, drinks wine, and falls into a drunken, naked stupor. Ham sees his father in this condition, emasculates Noah and tells his brothers about their father. "And Shem and Yaphet took [vayikah – singular] a *simlah*/garment... walked backwards and covered their father." When Noah awoke, he understood all that had happened and predicted the future for his three sons: "Cursed is Canaan [Ham's son] a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. Blessed is Hashem, the God of Shem... May God *Yapht* give beauty to Yaphet and may he dwell in the tents of Shem..."

The history of the ancestors is a prediction for their future descendants. The actions of Noah's three sons bear witness to this while also giving us insight into how our service to Hashem differs from the service of other nations. The verb [he] took is in the singular. Rashi therefore deduces that initially only Shem took the garment and then Yaphet joined him. Therefore, the descendants of Shem were rewarded with *tzitzit*, whereas Yaphet's descendants will be rewarded with being buried after the cataclysmic war of Gog and Magog. How do we understand this, asks the Imrei Chen?

The Mikdash Halevi notes that while both

Shem and Yaphet seem to have done the same action, the mindset and effort was different. Shem took the initiative while Yaphet then went along. Donning *tzitzit* is a constant, daily, active, living reward while burial is a proper, onetime reward in which the deceased himself takes no action. The greater effort of Shem earned him the greater reward. As Letitcha Elyon notes, citing Rabbi Wachtfogel, z'l, although outwardly actions seem to be equal, Hashem is acutely aware of the difference. So too, the same *mitzvah* can require more effort from one person than from another. Hashem rewards for the commitment and effort as well as the act itself.

The essence of the *mitzvah* is the investment of self even more than the performance itself, writes Rabbi Pliskin. This was the difference between Shem and Yaphet and the difference in how a Jew and a non-Jew lives his life. One who goes the extra mil is the true eved Hashem. After all, reminds us Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z'l, this world was not created for repose, but for struggle. That's why Hashem rewards effort. When you do only the minimal requirements, you are removing the "yoke of Heaven," writes the Sifsei Chaim. One must take the initiative and go above and beyond. When you make the extra effort in a difficult undertaking, you are investing yourself and making it part of you, just as your VESTments are part of you. Therefore, Hashem rewarded Shem with an article of clothing that would be used for a *mitzvah* writes Vezos LeYaakov.

Cham represents the one motivated by physical desires. Yaphet represents the ego, conforming to social norms. Shem represents the superego, understanding that there is a higher purpose in life. The Shvilei Pinchas explains that Shem covered his father for the *mitzvah*. Yaphet did it out of proper etiquette. The Jew, even when he thinks he's doing a *mitzvah* for a reward ultimately wants the connection to Hashem, while the non Jew has ulterior motives. Therefore, Hashem gave Bnei Yisroel the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* as a way of constantly connecting to Hashem.

Rabbi Zweig notes that Cham's action was driven completely by personal desire. Yaphet, who exalted the perfection of the human body, found it inappropriate to have a mutilated body visible. Only Shem wanted to retain his father's dignity and covered him with a *simlah*, (clothing) representing dignity. *Tzitzit* fringes would be a symbol of identity and dignity, much like a graduate's tassel. Yefet's reward, is similarly in the final war, the disfigured bodies will be buried, which is distasteful to the aesthetic eye.

With the nations of the world, writes Rabbi Mintzberg, external appearances are everything. In contrast, *Bnei Yisrael* invests everything with the additional level of sanctity, that this is what Hashem commands, and this elevates their actions to a higher dimension.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 13

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In this class, we will analyze chapters 78 and 24 in Tehilim. Chapter 78 was written by Assaf, a Levite. It begins with the words, "I shall express riddles..." indicating that there is something deeper that is being conveyed. Assaf mentions three directives. "And they should put their hope in God, and not forget the deeds of God, and keep His commandments." How will we achieve these goals? The chapter discusses the wonders Hashem performed for the Jewish people and how their actions seemed to indicate that they had forgotten it all. "And they contested Hashem in their hearts by requesting food for their

cravings..." The generation of the desert saw the hand of Hashem in an incredibly open way. They witnessed the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, water pouring forth from a rock...How could they not trust Hashem? They failed time and again and it seems they forgot all the miracles Hashem performed. How can we understand this?

There's a story told about a *chassid* who came to his Rebbe looking despondent. When the Rebbe questioned him, he answered that now that they were reading *Chumash Bamidbar* he felt depressed. The generation of the desert

were very great yet time and again they failed. The Rebbe answered, it is these very failures that created the *Torah*.

I once met someone who was marrying off his 12th child. He was not well off and having already married off 11 children, he was not having an easy time. He told me how he dealt with it, referring to Tehilim, chapter 78. We read about the generation of the desert, and we wonder how could they not trust Hashem after all the miracles they experienced. But then I look at myself. Hashem put me on this world, gave me talents, a livelihood, a good

Continued on page 2



Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 13

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn
Continued from page 1

family, provided for my 13 children, helped me marry off 11 children, and now after all these wonders, when I'm marrying off my 12th child, I still have doubts that everything will fall into place? Can't I trust Hashem and be calm? Isn't this a riddle? Anyone can say this. We experience countless miracles every day. We should be the calmest people on earth. But no. We don't trust Hashem. We worry. We are even capable of doing things against Hashem who sustains our every breath. This is a riddle which can't be understood logically. It's the conundrum of the power of free choice. Doing

something against the will of Hashem seems ludicrous. Chazal say, "When a person sins it is because a spirit of insanity entered him." How is it that people can ignore their good judgement while doing things against Hashem and against themselves? The urge to protect ourselves is very strong and still we can do things that bring upon ourselves pain and distance from Hashem.

The recognition that free choice is a miracle is what Assaf wanted to convey to us in this chapter. Not doing Hashem's will even once is

insanity, although it doesn't feel that way. Voices in our head try to convince us that it's for our benefit. It's a riddle and it can only happen because Hashem wants it to happen. The higher the creation, the more difficult the choices that are presented. The greater the person, the greater the *yetzer hara*. Every person is tested based on his specific circumstances. And this is really something miraculous, something beyond our understanding.

Melechet Kotev Temporary Writing

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

There's a disagreement between the Ran and the Rashba regarding the *melacha* of *kotev*. If you don't actually form the letters themselves, but engrave them on the background and the letters emerge- such as taking playdough clay and pressing it down on the back of a mold, is this considered *kotev d'oraysa*? The Gemara in Gittin states that if you engrave on the back of a surface and not on the letters themselves, it's not considered *ketiva*. The Rashba assumes the same thing would apply to *melechet Shabbat*. Engraving on the background and not on the letters themselves is not considered *kotev d'orayta*. The definition of *kotev* means you have to form the letters themselves in a direct fashion.

The Ran disagrees. When it comes to a get, the *Torah* requires a formal act of writing. But when it comes to *melechet Shabbat* there's no such requirement. The *Torah* is not so much concerned about the actual writing, but with the intent to form letters and the result. Writing even in an unusual fashion with the intent to do so, is considered *melechet machshevet* and is *ossur* on *Shabbat*. If you formed letters

even on a background, it's considered *kotev*. The Ran quotes a Gemara in Bava Kamma which seems to echo this idea. If I lit a flame on my property and then the wind helped spread it to a neighbor's property where it caused damage, I'm exempt from responsibility. This is because it's a grama. If not for the wind, it wouldn't have happened. Therefore I can't be held responsible. The Gemara asks- why is it not the same for the *melacha* of *zoreh*- winnowing? When you take wheat and chaff and separate the good from the bad, you've set the process in motion, but the wind did the actual action. Yet one is still *chayiv* for the *melacha*. The Gemara answers, there's a fundamental difference between the *melacha* of *zoreh* and *nezikin*. With *melechet Shabbat*, we care about the result not the action itself. Since you achieve the result of separating the bad from the good via the wind, it doesn't matter how it's accomplished. The fact that the wind was your agent, although you didn't do it yourself, still makes you responsible.

The Rosh asks, does this only applies to *zoreh*? The nature of the *melacha* is that the

wind does the action. You just set a process in motion. But when it comes to other *melachot*, the person has to do the actual action. Or do you assume that *zoreh* represents a paradigm that exists fundamentally and applies to all *melachot*. You don't have to do the action itself. As long as you set the process in motion you are held responsible. This is a disagreement between the Ran and the Rashba. The Rambam says if you trap animals using a dog, that's a *toldah* of *tzad*. You are not doing the trapping. Your dog is serving as your agent. The Rambam would seem to be consistent with the idea that even though you are not doing the action yourself, you're achieving the desired result and you would indeed be *chayiv*.

How do we view *melachot Shabbat*? Do we assume like the Ran that our primary interest is not the action but the result? Or do we assume that the action is critical and therefore there will be a uniform *halacha* when it comes to *kotev* regarding *gittin* and *melechet Shabbat*? We will discuss this question further in the next installment.