

Parshat Noach – Wonderful Words

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

By: Devora Kaye

“V’Noach matza chen b’inei Hashem. Noach found grace in the eyes of Hashem.” What grace did Noach possess? In addition, Hashem could have saved Noach in any number of ways. Why was it necessary for him to build an ark and live among the animals?

The core sin of the Generation of the Flood was in the area of speech. They did not keep their word. Once the floodgates of dishonesty are opened, it flows down to all areas of life. In Tehilim 45 we read, “The beauty of man is when grace is on the lips.” Hashem made two covenants with the Jewish people: *brit halashon* – a covenant of the mouth, and *brit milah* – a covenant to act morally. The two are interconnected. This is the grace that Noach found in Hashem’s eyes. He mastered the art of refined speech.

The Sefat Emet notes that if a person learns silence, he can be careful when he does speak to communicate in a modest way. Indeed we see in this *parsha* that although the Torah measures every word, two extra words are used to describe the non kosher animals of the ark. “*Umin habeheima asher lo tehora*” instead of “*temeiah*,” to emphasize how far one must

go to speak in a sanctified way.

In Breishit, when Hashem created man, the Torah writes, “*Vayipach b’apo nishmas chaim*.” Targum translates this as, “*ruach memalelah*” – the power of speech. When a person abuses this power, he casts away the part of him that makes him human. A coarse manner of speech corrupts his divine image. Therefore, we understand why Hashem wanted to destroy the world. His plan was to recreate it with individuals who would appreciate the divine spark within them. When a person misuses his speech he destroys his human essence and becomes almost animalistic. This is why Noach spent the year with animals. It was a constant reminder of what makes a human being elevated and different from animals, namely his power of speech.

Rebbetzin Feldbrand, in *Towards Meaningful Prayer*, writes that “*teiva*” can be translated interchangeably to mean word or ark. He was saved by the power of words.

When we wallow in the superficial aspects of this world we are no better than animals. Noach was punished and sentenced to live with animals for a year. This was to teach him that his generation had stayed at the level of

animals because he did not reach out to inspire them.

On some level we are all responsible for each other and are enjoined to pray when troubles come. If one does not *daven*, it shows a lack of appreciation for prayer and insensitivity to the pain of others. This needs cultivation. If you hear bad news, pray. If a friend confides in you, try to help him. If you cannot assist him, at least daven for him. Understand that if Hashem made you aware of this trouble, you have a responsibility to do something.

Why did Hashem show Noach the covenant of the rainbow after the Flood? The Sforno answers that in a sense Hashem is hinting to us that every person has a responsibility as part of *Klal Yisrael* to pray in a time of need. The rainbow signifies a time of judgment. It is our wakeup call to beseech Hashem to turn it into mercy.

As we begin the new semester, let us rededicate ourselves to prayer, proper speech, and helping people in need with fresh vigor and hope for a year of growth and self improvement.

Parshat Noach: Expanding The Essence

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Noach begins, “Noach was righteous in his generation.” Rashi offers two differing interpretations on this verse. One view maintains that Noach was a tzaddik and had he lived in a more righteous generation he would’ve been an even greater tzaddik. The second view maintains that in comparison with his wicked contemporaries, Noach was a tzaddik. Had he lived in the time of Avraham, however, he would have been insignificant. This Rashi seems puzzling and needs elucidation.

The Divrei Yisrael explains that the word “*b’dorotav*” is in plural form to teach us that the generation of Noach had conflicting opinions about him. Some individuals held him to be a tzaddik while the general populace viewed him as insignificant. Rav Dessler offers a different explanation. Noach was a tzaddik. He reached the tremendous level of utilizing his entire

being to serve Hashem. This defines the level of a righteous person, namely, one who completes his allotted task on this earth.

However, there are levels above this. A tzaddik can add to his portion. In this respect, Noach is compared unfavorably to Avraham. Avraham personified chesed. He revealed the glory of Hashem in such a supreme way that he extended his portion to embrace the portion of all the people in the world for ten generations. Rav Dessler adds that it is a disgrace to the honor of Hashem on a certain level not to achieve more. A tzaddik must constantly reach higher and use his additional powers to glorify Hashem’s name.

We too must go beyond ourselves. We must take our passion and enthusiasm for Hashem and ignite a spark in others. If our only ambition is to perfect ourselves, we are limited. This was the difference between Noach and Avraham.

In fact, Noach did not even pray to Hashem to save his generation. Why not?

Rav Schwab answers that Noach was influenced by the self interest of the society around him. However, instead of pursuing material pleasure he focused on attaining personal spiritual pleasure. That is why, in Avraham’s generation, where Avraham’s essence was expansion, Noach would’ve been insignificant.

Rav Miller explains Noach’s conduct as an expression of his tzidkut. Noach personified din, strict judgement. He could not daven for his generation at the level they were at. In this he differed from Avraham, whose kindness and mercy drove him to beseech Hashem to save sin-ridden Sedom.

Continued on Page 2



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Continued from Page 1

Rav Baer in Maasei Rokeach offers a different explanation. Noach's inability to affect others stemmed from his humility. He was afraid that he would not be able to withstand negative influences, so he separated from his generation rather than to be influenced by them. He did not think much of himself and therefore he did not pray for the others.

In contrast, Avraham mastered the perfect balance between individuality and responsibility to the community. First he developed himself

and then he went out to influence others. When Lot and Yishmael proved to be a negative influence, he mustered the courage to send them away. However, he still maintained a level of responsibility for them. In the same sense we too must assume the mission of bringing our lost brethren back to Torah, separate ourselves from negativity when necessary, yet still maintain accountability. Noach in his ark was cut off from the rest of the world. Our job is to be like Avraham's tent, open on all sides, to draw our brethren closer to Hashem.

Reish Lakish says, "Believe in your inherent greatness and aim for higher levels." Rav Yochanan counters, "Realize you are nothing and that you have a long way to go." We need to juggle a balance of both views in our lives. Rav Tatz writes that life is about growth, self development and influencing others. It is maintaining the equilibrium of being an 'everything' and a 'nothing'. May we merit reaching this level of self perfection and ignite spiritual passion within others.

How Choices Define Life

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

When Hashem created Adam he gathered the dust of the world and imbued Adam with a living soul. Rashi says Hashem kneaded the two like baker forms dough. Just as the water and flour cannot be separated out again, so too the soul and the body of man can never be completely severed. The body and its desire for vivid pleasure, and the soul and its desire for depth and connective reality, are always in balance. There's 50/50 free choice.

People search for aesthetic pleasure. They pursue art, nature, music, beautiful objects and experiences which although not as vivid as coarse physical pleasure, are more meaningful and deep. In Western society this is the end goal. People think if they attain whatever beauty they strive for, they'll be happy forever. However aesthetics is limited by one factor. You can have it but you don't become it. And so when you stop having it, you're left with yourself which can lead to depression. Everyone knows this intellectually, fewer know this emotionally. But when you do, the primary search moves on to relationships. What you really love about another person isn't their body but their soul. Everyone's soul is an aspect of Hashem. Spiritual bonding is a manifestation of loving Hashem. True reward, becoming who you want to be, is making the choice for the soul to prevail over the body.

People change not only individually but collectively. The first wide reaching transfor-

mation took place as a consequence of Adam's sin. A person who chooses wrong teaches himself not to see Hashem. Sin causes the animal side to get stronger, one's sensitivity to be altered and one's spiritual side to weaken. Just as a foundation impacts the entire building, Adam's deed had an everlasting influence on future generations. The world changed as it was. If Adam would've chosen right he would've reached immediate perfection and become master over himself forever.

Thought, speech, and action give us insight into what a person is. But there's a self under that, one's true essence which is hidden. You could be doing all the right things but it may not penetrate your core. Who you really are reveals itself at the point of 50/50 choice. If it's all superficial then your soul may not be strong enough to withstand temptation. Adam's choice was about what his essence would be. If he would've chosen good, his soul would've overtaken his material self. Most of us don't ever penetrate to our core selves. We know what we think. We know there's a vital force within us that keep us alive. But we don't know the soul that yearns to take the body upwards. We don't know the part of us that seeks to transform the exploitive, egotistical, side of ourselves. When the body is elevated through the soul, it can experience some of the soul's wholeness. If Adam would've chosen well, his soul would've purified his body through many levels until it would have become an open vessel with the same kind of light the soul had. But because he sinned everything changed.

The part of him that was lacking became even more telling and the whole world was diminished. If Adam would've inclined towards the good he would immediately rectified his flaws and reached ultimate perfection.

Adam created imbalance for himself where it would now be more difficult to attain wholeness. In order to change he had to change himself and in order to change the world, he had to undo the damage. Then he could begin living and growing. Challenges which were originally external are now internalized. We struggle with the question, "Who am I?" We're so addictive to blaming people and situations that we tend to think of the *yetzer hara* as something on the outside. We have to stop and begin working on the inside. We have to undo the damage before we can figure out who we want to be in the 50/50 moments. Emotions follow imagery which is not always honest. Therefore the mind must lead.

After Adam's sin, Hashem introduced death. The body must die and disintegrate and then there will be renewal when the soul returns in a purified state. We will reach perfection with the revival of the dead. This is what meant in the Gemara where it says that the world will exist for 6,000 years and then it will be destroyed. There will be rebirth and reward for struggle. There will be release from confusion and ultimately final rectification.