

way. Betzalel was adamant; he was not taking off time to return to the doctor. "I must return immediately to the cheder, so that I may continue my Torah learning!" he declared. "I received a gift from Hashem. I can now see again. I have no idea how long this gift will last. Therefore, I must use every spare minute to learn the holy Torah. Who knows how long I will be able to see?" Betzalel returned to school, refusing to go to the doctor.

The story is obviously incredible. What impressed me most was Rav Zolti's attitude to regaining his sight. It was a gift. How can one squander such a gift? This is how we should live. Every moment of life, every ability to move, speak, think, see, etc. is a gift. It is something we must appreciate; we must value. The greatest expression of our appreciation is not to waste it.

"Too little – too late." Are we prepared to stand before the Heavenly Tribunal and explain to Hashem why we were guilty of doing too little – too late?" Noach cried for the victims of the flood. Too little – too late. In the following vignette, the Chafetz Chaim, zl, reiterates this idea.

The Chafetz Chaim was once asked by the Rav in Lida (a neighboring town to Radin) to visit his community and exhort its citizens to open their wallets to invest in a new mikvah for the town. For decades, the Chafetz Chaim had traveled all over for the purpose of strengthening Judaism. Lida would be no different. Despite his advanced age and feeble health, he agreed to come. He came to the town and spoke passionately of the importance of supporting the mikvah, but, while most people were respectful of the sage, he was unable to reach the required goal. They did not accumulate sufficient funds to build a mikvah.

A few weeks later, on a snowy Friday morning, the Chafetz Chaim announced that he was traveling to Lida to complete the mission that he had commenced on behalf of the mikvah. His family argued that he never traveled on a Friday, for fear of arriving late for Shabbos. Furthermore, it was snowy outside; anything could go wrong, and, at his age, it was dangerous and foolhardy to make the trip. They tried to convince him to change his mind. The Chafetz Chaim was adamant. He had begun something. He would complete it.

He explained, "When I come to the World of Truth, they will surely ask me, 'Why did you not go to Lida?' What should I tell them – that I was cold; I was old and weak; the roads were snow-covered; it was frigid outside? Will they accept such excuses?"

The Chafetz Chaim went to Lida and was successful in reaching the people. He raised the necessary funds to build the mikvah – and (by the way) he made it home in time for Shabbos.

He could have waited until after Shabbos, but that might have been "too late."

Va'ani Tefillah

ברך עלינו... ואת כל מיני תבואתה לטובה
Bareich aleinu... v'es kol minei seuvasah l'tovah.

In this brachah, we pray for sustenance. When one consumes food without first praying for the food, he makes the food loathsome. In his Yearos Dvash, Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl, notes that Horav Moshe Cordovero, zl, the Rmak, would not even set the table without first praying for sustenance. It is, thus, appropriate that we pray to Hashem every day; petitioning Him to help us earn an honest living. We realize the inappropriateness of eating food which is tainted with any form of wrongdoing – whether it is in the area of kashrus of the product, or kashrus in the manner that we earned the money that purchased this food. We understand that such deficiencies in the food defile the body and deprive the soul of its vital nourishment. The Yearos Dvash explains that an honest meal is nourishment for the soul, for, by eating it, we release the "sparks of holiness" trapped in the food.

[The Zohar (Bereishis 4a) teaches that at Creation, as a result of Adam HaRishon's sin, a cosmic cataclysm occurred in which the vessels conveying Divine Light to the physical world shattered, spilling sparks of holiness (nitzotzos ha'kedushah) throughout the world. These sparks became trapped within the shells of impurity (klipos ha'tumah). It is now the mission of the Jew to redeem these nitzotzos by performing mitzvos.]

When a Jew makes a blessing prior to eating food, he sets free the sparks imbedded within the food and all of its sources, thereby returning them to their original holy state.

In loving memory of our dear husband,

Abba and Zeidy,

on his yartzheit

Mr. Zev Aryeh Solomon

ר' זאב ארי' ב"ר יעקב שמואל ז"ל

נפטר ח' חשוון תשע"ד

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Peninim is published weekly by Peninim Publications in conjunction with the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

©All rights reserved – prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

For a yearly subscription or Parsha sponsorship, please contact:

In Cleveland – Rabbi L. Scheinbaum (216) 321-5838 Ext. 165

Outside of North America – E. Goldberg +972 2-569 5185

Visit us at:
<http://www.hac1.org>



Parashas Noach

תשע"ה

פרשת נח

נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו

Noach was a righteous man perfect in his generations. (6:9)

We do not find another leader treated as negatively and judged as harshly as Noach. The Torah writes, Tamim hayah b'dorosav; "Perfect in his generations." Chazal interpret, "in his generations" in two ways. Some maintain this to be praiseworthy. Noach was righteous and perfect, even though he lived in a generation that was so corrupt that it had to be wiped out. Others counter that this statement is far from laudatory. Indeed, it implies that Noach's righteousness was viewed relative to his community. They were so evil that they made him look good! The issue is not whether Noach was good or not. He was certainly righteous, but was this only in comparison to the failings of his generation, or was he the real thing? Why do we seem to grapple only concerning Noach? Nowhere else do we find Chazal looking so askance at a leader.

Perhaps the reason we question the true character of Noach is that he failed. He had over a century to convince the people that the end was near; yet, he failed. Chazal wonder why. Why did such a great leader miss the opportunity to save his generation? The people obviously did not heed Noach's warnings, because they probably thought that he was slightly unhinged. Had they really respected him, they would have listened. Noach survived the Flood – alone, with his immediate family. The remainder of his generation had its chance, but eschewed it. Why did they not listen to Noach? This is the question that Chazal analyze. Could it be that Noach was not that great of a tzaddik, or at least insufficient to impress people?

Noach had an incredible fortuity handed to him on a silver platter. Saving the world is an opportunity that does not often present itself. Noach had this chance twice: before the Flood; and after the Flood. Yes, Noach lived for 350 years following the Flood. Hashem created a new world, but even in this new world we find the dor haflagah, generation of the dispersion, who were prepared to wage war with the Creator! Where was Noach? Where was his influence? This is why Chazal take issue with the word, b'dorosav, in his generations. Perhaps he was simply better than everyone else. That is it – better, but not necessarily righteous.

Others feel that living with moral degenerates, such that one is not being influenced by their repugnant behavior, is in and of itself the greatest accolade. To resist temptation when everyone is acting abominably is a sign of a righteous character. Noach was a real tzaddik, because anyone less would not have survived that horrible influence.

Nothing breeds success – like success. Nothing

earns a person positive attention like success. Nothing detracts from one's positive attributes like failure. It may not be fair, but it is a fact of life. Life is filled with incredible opportunities for growth and success. Some make the right choices. Others make the wrong choices. A third group just does not bother choosing.

What prevented Noach from reaching out to the people of his generation? For one hundred and twenty years, he slaved over the Ark. This was his idea of outreach – warning people of the gloom and doom that would envelop and destroy them if they did not repent and alter their lifestyles. This is not the way to reach people. There are those who refer to Judaism as the religion of "no." When asked what Judaism is, they invariably respond by itemizing all of the prohibitions that are part and parcel of an observant Jew's lifestyle. Unfortunately, they forget to present all of the positive aspects of Judaism, including all of the positive consequences of adhering to the prohibitive commandments. To convince a person of the beauty of Jewish life, we must demonstrate its beauty – not focus on what is prohibited and the punishment that accompanies transgression. People respond to the positive. No one is interested (at first) in the negative aspects. It is only after time that one comes to see the profundity behind each and every mitzvah.

In his commentary to Bereishis 6:8, Sforno distinguishes between Noach and Avraham Avinu. Three great individuals were spared as a result of their having found chein, favor, in the eyes of Hashem: Daniel; Iyov; and Noach. They alone were spared – not the members of their generation. They were not like Moshe Rabbeinu, Avraham Avinu and Shmuel HaNavi, who reached out and taught and led their respective generations. A righteous man who perfects himself is worthy of saving himself – alone, but one who perfects others as well merits to be the medium for saving others. Noach admonished, but he did not teach his generation about Hashem. He taught them that corruption – both ethical and moral – is destructive to a vibrant society. It undermines their goals and harms them individually and collectively. Noach never taught them that there is a G-d Who created and continues to guide the world. Noach's approach has become the standard tikkun olam, repairing the world, route employed by Judaism's secular streams, who realize that by acknowledging Hashem, they are obligated to serve Him and observe His Torah. Thus, they save neither themselves nor their constituents, who have all, for the most part, become victims of assimilation.

Avraham taught the members of his generation that there is a Creator, Who, as G-d of history, also supervises the life and destiny of each and every human being. He explained

that belief in Hashem is accompanied by obligations. Unless one makes demands on his students, his lessons will be short-lived. When one gives and gives and does not ask for anything in return, he will receive very little in return.

נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורו

Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation. (6:9)

The Talmud Sanhedrin 108b relates that actually the decree to annihilate the dor haMabul, generation of the Flood, had originally applied to Noach as well. It was rescinded due to the chein, favor, Noach found before Hashem: V'Noach matzah chein b'einei Hashem, "Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem" (Bereishis 6:8). The question which confronts the reader is whether or not Noach was worthy of reprieve. If he was not, why should "favor" alter his sentence? Since when does favor determine one's worthiness?

Our sages debate the integrity of Noach's virtue: Did it stand on its own accord, or was it relative to the rest of his generation? Was Noach righteous, despite the evil of his generation, or was he a tzaddik only in comparison to them? The Midrash indicates that Noach's spending an entire year in the Ark toiling 24/7 to feed its motley collection of passengers was, in and of itself, a punishment. Apparently, his level of righteousness was deficient.

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, cites the Chasam Sofer who posits that, in his own right, Noach was unworthy of being spared from the flood waters. He was guilty either of less-than-perfect virtue or not praying hard enough for the members of his generation. In any event, he was spared only because, relative to his generation, he was a tzaddik. Thus, although Noach was spared, he had to undergo a year of severe and painful toil as penance for his shortfall in regard to righteousness. Furthermore, it was necessary to set the correct standard for virtue and send out a message for the future: One's righteousness is not measured relative to others. He must personally be on a plane of virtue which is in its own right, exclusive of any comparisons to others, wholly perfect. Hashem could have easily saved Noach without employing the medium of the Ark. He did not, because he wanted Noach to achieve tzidkus status in his own right.

Rav Friedman explains that Hashem specifically chose Noach, who was a relative tzaddik (only in comparison with the evildoers of his generation), because this was the first hatzalah, deliverance, from death; thus, it would serve as the prototype for future hatzolos. Maase avos siman labanim, "The deeds of the fathers are a portent for the children": The first time Hashem does something sets the standard for parallel future events. Noach's deliverance from the raging waters of the Flood became the foundation-stone for all future deliverances in which Hashem's People would be spared. Therefore, in the future, whenever Klal Yisrael would be in dire straits which required Hashem's deliverance, He would rescue them even if their worthiness was only relative to the evil of their pursuers/oppressors/despots who sought to destroy them.

We must confront the reality that we often lack perfection. Times change; generations decline, with the spiritual achievements of today paling in comparison to that of yesterday. Hashem spared Noach. He will do the same for

each generation whose spiritual success falls short. We may be far from perfect, but we are leagues ahead of the competition.

בא אתה וכל ביתך אל התבה

Come to the Ark, you and all your household. (7:1)

A teivah is an Ark, a container, a box which holds an object within its confines. Teivah is also a word. The Chassidic Masters, notably the Baal Shem Tov, zl, render Hashem's command to Noach to "Come into the Teivah" homiletically. Hashem is also saying: "Enter into the words of prayer and Torah study; there you will find a sanctuary of wisdom, meaning and holiness amidst the raging flood waters of life."

The various commentators expound on this play-on-word translation. Perhaps we can focus on the meaning of teivah/word as the reason for the disaster that befell that generation, and then attempt to suggest how the teivah was an opportunity for penance. People communicate largely by word of mouth. They speak to one another. What they say and how they express themselves distinguishes between a good word, a kind word, a complimentary word, a bad word, a slanderous word. We all have an idea of the value and significance of the correct word, well-placed and expressed with care and sensitivity. A good word can save someone's life – or destroy him – if the word is evil and demeaning. I think it is all reflected in the manner of expression. Does one just release the word and forget about it, not caring if it hurts someone, or does he "enter into his word," remain a part of it? Are our words just "talk" without substance? Do we stand behind our words, or do we throw them out – and run, separating ourselves from the damage they have wrought?

Words can be soothing, invigorating, encouraging, enlivening. They can be transmitters of joy; they can make a person feel that someone cares about them, that they are not alone. It all depends on whether the words are real or are simply words spoken, but not really reflecting the personality and character of the author, because he has already divorced himself from them and escaped. One must be part of the words that he articulates, because how one expresses himself is as important as what he says.

The teivah was one large floating container that housed the future of the world in an area which could best be described as "close." There was nowhere to go. Whatever was said had to be supported. Noach fed all the animals and fowl 24/7, with no rest. How he brought the food, what he said, and how he said it were all as important as the actual food. The smile that accompanied his acts of kindness could be a game-changer that made a huge difference in the attitude of the recipient. The teivah was an enormous floating chesed operation.

The generation of the Flood was destroyed due to a lack of morality, reflected in their interpersonal relationships. People did whatever they wanted without respect for, or sensitivity towards, their fellow. The Torah states that they were guilty of chamaz, theft. Chamaz is a form of theft whereby the "buyer" takes and pays, even though the seller is not interested in selling. There is no conversation between them. The seller plunks down the cash and leaves: no respect; no sensitivity; no conversation.

Chesed performed without respect for the recipient is not much different, because it reflects the benefactor's lack of respect. It is all in what we say, how we say it, and the smile that accompanies the communication. Words? What are mere words? Plenty. They define our actions. They represent who we are. Words properly spoken and presented can save. Misplaced words can be devastating. The teivah taught its travelers the significance of properly tooled speech.

ויאמר ד' לנח בא אתה וכל ביתך אל התבה

Then Hashem said to Noach, "Come to the Ark, you and all your household." (7:1)

The Zohar HaKadosh asks, "Could Hashem not have secured Noach in a corner of the world, safe from the raging waters of the mabul, flood?" He could have transported Noach to Eretz Yisrael, which was left unscathed, and have him remain there throughout the deluge. Rabbi Shimon explains that Hashem wanted Noach to experience the flood, to see its massive destruction. Why did Hashem want Noach to be in the Ark, within the floodwaters, surrounded by death? Horav Chaim Zaitchick, zl, explains that it was important for Noach to see and feel, to see the dead and dying, to feel their pain, to experience their fear and agony, so that he would: A.) remember the punishment meted out to those who mutiny against Hashem, who eschew His word; B) be forever grateful for being spared from death. This could only occur if Noach were spared from within the waters of the flood. Had he been tucked away in some distant island or ensconced in Eretz Yisrael, the suffering and death would not be real; thus, his gratitude would be missing an element of authenticity.

Veritably, even after Noach left the Ark, we find that he was rebuked for caring too late. The Zohar writes that when Noach exited the Teivah and saw firsthand the terrible destruction from which he had been spared, he began to weep bitterly, "Ribbono Shel Olam, You are called Rachum, Compassionate. You should have shown mercy towards Your creations." Hashem countered, "Foolish shepherd! Now you plead on their behalf? Where were you earlier when I informed you that I was going to send a flood to destroy your generation? The tears that you shed now are too late." There is a time and place for prayer. How many of us have been guilty of noticing someone's pain – too late in the game, when our assistance is neither effective nor desired? Noach was clearly a sensitive person, but he required a trigger to jumpstart his empathy and sensitivity. That trigger was the Teivah. Sadly, it was too late for the victims of the flood.

"Too little – too late" is not an uncommon rejoinder. What makes a person wait and not do what is obviously necessary – immediately – when it is most opportune? I think it is because we do not acknowledge the greatest gift that Hashem grants us: time. Times is life. Unless we appreciate this verity, we will squander time. When we frivol away time – we fritter away life. It is that simple. Sadly, most people fail to think about it this way. I recently read a story concerning Horav Betzalel Zolti, zl, who was a Torah giant without peer. The story demonstrates the attitude we must maintain with regard to time and the gifts of life and health that Hashem grants us.

When young Betzalel Zolti was a lad of ten years

old, an epidemic of serious eye disease overran Yerushalayim. Most victims who became infected with this eye virus tragically lost their eyesight, because there was no medicine to combat it. Betzalel was a brilliant student whose thirst for Torah was unquenchable. He studied every minute of the day. Orphaned of his father as a young child, Betzalel was cared for by his mother, who had high expectations for her young son and felt that one day he would rise to Torah leadership in the Jewish community.

Betzalel's mother always davened for her son's continued health, but especially so during the raging epidemic. When one day Betzalel came home from cheder complaining that his eyes hurt, she became extremely anxious and immediately turned Heavenward in fervent prayer, hoping that it was nothing more than a mere infection. The next day, when Betzalel came home from school, his eyes swollen and painful and his vision beginning to blur, she knew that something was terribly wrong with her precious child. A trip to the doctor confirmed her worst fear: Betzalel was, tragically going blind. The diagnosis proved correct, when, a few days later, Betzalel's vision weakened considerably, and then he went blind. How could her beloved son study Torah if he were unable to read the text?

In her deep pain, Betzalel's mother did what any responsible Jewish mother would do: prepared to take her son to the kever, gravesite, of Rachel Imeinu, our Matriarch, and pour out her heart to her. She packed up Betzalel in a baby carriage for the two-hour trek. Since a carriage was not the most efficient mode of transportation, she could hardly walk with him for two hours without stumbling. When they arrived at the gravesite, both mother and son broke down sobbing and wailing that the Momma Rachel intercede on their behalf before Hashem, that He rescind the decree against Betzalel.

Betzalel cried out, "Hashem, I ask You one request, which I want our Matriarch Rachel to also hear: I am prepared to give up my vision and never see my loving mother ever again, my friends, the food that I eat – I am ready to accept never seeing the world again, but one thing I am not prepared to give up is seeing Your holy Torah! I cannot live without learning Your Torah!

"I am a young boy who has not learned enough of Your Torah. It is so vast, so great; I want to know it all!" With heartrending cries that split the Heavens, Betzalel pleaded with Hashem to grant him back his vision, so that he could continue learning Torah. His tears flowed freely in a small rivulet to the grave of Rachel. Exhausted from the journey, the prayers, the tears, and emotionally spent from the ordeal, Betzalel fell asleep. His mother picked him up, placed him in the carriage and pushed him home.

The next morning, Betzalel woke and asked his mother to please allow him to return to school. "How can you go? You are unable to see. How can you learn – you are blind" she said, as tears welled up in her eyes. He answered, "Mommy, I can see now, and I want to run to school to learn Torah!"

Betzalel's mother understood what had transpired. They were the beneficiaries of an overt miracle. They had prayed to Hashem, and He had answered. Nonetheless, his mother felt it prudent to take her son to the doctor to confirm that his sight had returned – and would remain that