



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Noach

HAMELECH

The Purpose of the *Teivah*

In this week's *parashah*, we are told of a generation in which the people were involved in the wrong types of activities. It got to the point that they all had to be destroyed. Only Noach was worth saving because he was righteous. Hashem told Noach to build a *teivah* (a boat of sorts, with certain distinct dimensions) and thereby be saved from the flood which Hashem will bring. This gives rise to a number of questions:

- 1) It is apparent from the teachings of our Sages that the *teivah* was in no way capable of saving Noach from the fierce, boiling waters of the *mabul* (flood). So why was Noach told to make the *teivah* if it could not really help him anyway?
- 2) Our Sages teach that the flood did not affect Eretz Yisroel. So why did Hashem not just tell Noach to go there and be saved?
- 3) Our Sages teach that Noach and his sons worked hard, day and night, feeding each animal the right food, right amount, each at a particular time of day. They barely slept. If Noach was such a great *tzaddik* and Hashem is saving his life, why must it be done in such a painful manner?
- 4) On the verse, "And these are the progeny of Noach etc.", our Sages expound that the main "offspring" of a person are his own good deeds. Why is Noach, in particular, chosen to illustrate this lesson?
- 5) Our Sages disagree as to whether Noach would have been considered righteous in other

generations or was he only considered righteous in contrast to the wicked people of the time. Now, if the verse calls him righteous, why should we not think that the intention is objective as opposed to subjective?

6) Why was Noach saved? The *pasuk* says because he was a *tzaddik*. But our Sages teach that he was saved because he worked so hard at tending to the animals' needs. What is the real reason?

Right to Life

In Pirkei Avot (1:2) we are taught: Shimon the Righteous was of the last remaining members of the Great Assembly. He would often say: the world stands on three things: upon Torah, upon service of Hashem (sacrifices or prayer) and upon bestowal of kindness.

At the start, the primary pillar was meant to be the one of *chessed* (kindness). That is why that generation deserved to be destroyed because their whole lives were dedicated to the antithesis of *chessed*. They were very self-centered. They had no problem grabbing and snatching other people's belongings. They specifically tried to take small amounts at a time so that they would not be taken to task for their misdeeds. This was an upheaval of the trait of kindness. Only Noach was sympathetic towards others, so only he and his family deserved to be saved. Since his generation was so bad, when he was called a *tzaddik*, it really makes you wonder how much of



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a *tzaddik* he really was. Was he a total *tzaddik* or only in contrast to the wicked of his generation?

Once Destruction Strikes

Why did Hashem Himself smite the firstborn Egyptians on that fateful night of the fifteenth of Nissan, the night of the Jewish exodus from Egypt? Our Sages teach that once destruction strikes, the righteous are not given amnesty.

Thus, when the city of Sodom had to be destroyed, Lot was whisked out of there. He could not remain hidden away in some corner and survived. He had to be totally removed. Similarly, no Jew could wander around Mitzrayim on that night. They had to stay indoors.

[Each episode of Divine retribution has its own conditions. Sodom was totally overturned, so it would not have helped Lot to stay at home indoors. Egypt was not totally overturned. Only their firstborn were slain that night. Nonetheless, the Jews had to remain indoors in order to stay safe.]

Now, Noach's generation was totally obliterated. The *Mabul* came and wiped out the world. So how did a *teivah* suffice? How was that enough to keep Noach and his family safe?

Chessed Headquarters

We now have the answer as to why Hashem told Noach to build a *teivah*. The *teivah* was not just a "lifeboat" for physical survival by any natural means. Survival on the *teivah* itself was supernatural, only in the merit of the round-the-clock *chessed* performed therein. As stated, the

world stands upon kindness. If the world at large failed to function as the pillar of kindness faltered, *teivat Noach* flourished and endured only in the merit of it serving as a place of ultimate non-stop kindness. It was the one-to-one *chessed* performed with each living creature, providing it with its daily means of sustenance, which kept the *teivah* intact and afloat. "Tzedakah saves from death." *Chessed* has the power to transform Strict Judgment to Compassion.

The people in Noach's generation had everything planned out how to save themselves from the *Mabul*, but to no avail. None of their physical tactics proved successful; as strong and mighty as they were, Hashem is, obviously, yet stronger and smarter. Noach's *teivah* remained only in the merit of the kindness performed within. Hashem knew that Noach was a kind-hearted person, fit for the job. Thus, Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.

A Good Substitute

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai and Rabbi Yehoshua were once walking in Yerushalyaim and came upon the ruins of the Beit Hamikdash. R' Yehoshua expressed his anguish at the sight. "Oy!" he exclaimed, "The place where we received atonement for all of our sins has been destroyed!"

R' Yochanan ben Zakai responded, "My dear, do not be so forlorn, for we have another form of atonement in its stead, namely: Gemilut Chasadim. Which *Chessed* did Daniel do in Bavel which was tantamount to bringing sacrifices? He



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saw to it that brides were properly prepared for their weddings and he made a point of gladdening them. He escorted the deceased to their burial. He gave donations to the needy. He prayed three times a day. His prayers were readily accepted.

Tzedakah Saving Lives

We now relate a true story which occurred in Yerushalayim several decades ago. There was a wealthy philanthropist who supported many worthy causes. On one occasion, an orphan was to marry an orphaness and they had not the minimal necessities. The *chattan* approached this philanthropist, asking for assistance. The *chattan* was hoping for a generous handout. Much to his surprise and great delight, the philanthropist agreed to cover the costs of the entire wedding on the condition that he be invited to attend the festivities. The *chattan* was so very grateful and assured him that he would be first on the invitation list.

As providence would have it, with all the many preparations, somehow the *chattan* forgot to invite his most generous benefactor. Here he was, about to enter his own *chuppah* and suddenly he remembers that he forgot to invite the man who made this all possible!

Despite the awkwardness, the *chattan* informed the assembled of his mistake, and announced that all assembled will immediately walk over to the home of the philanthropist, escorted by the musicians. The jubilant entourage arrived at the well-to-do home and the *chattan* knocked on the

door. All seemed dark, but the door was unlocked. After repeated knocks, the *chattan* gently let himself in and saw an incredible sight. The philanthropist and his wife were tied up tightly, unable to move.

What had happened? Thieves had come, tied them up, and began beating them. They threatened to kill them if they would not reveal where all their money was hidden. Just then, the wedding party was marching in their direction. Fearing it was the police, the gangsters fled, taking nothing.

The man understood that his act of *tzedakah* had saved his life. They participated in the wedding and rejoiced wholeheartedly.

Three or Four Options

Here is another Chesed Salvation Story. About twenty years ago, Engineer Eliyahu Zerabi lived in Holon. He prayed at the "Sudi" Beit Knesset, which was really a round-the-clock Torah and Chessed center. One night, Mr. Zerabi had a most disturbing dream. He made sure to say the Hatavat Chalom by Birkat Kohanim. He also decided to review his Maaser Kesafim account. It came out that he needed to pay 1036 shekalim. Without hesitation, he gave the full amount to the *gabai*. Then he went to work in Beit Lechem. A hotel had been built there and Mr. Zerabi had designed the air conditioning.

From Beit Lechem, his next stop was Ariel. The shorter way was through Ramallah but who wants to get stones thrown at them. So Eliyahu chose to go on Kivish Alon instead. Part of it includes a



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narrow stretch, one side mountain, one side a deep valley. And suddenly... an army vehicle was approaching very fast from the other direction. The driver seemed to have fallen asleep. He was driving in the wrong lane, against traffic! What should Eliyahu do?! He had a fraction of a second to decide! A sharp turn to the right, over the cliff? Left into the mountainside? Keep going straight, hoping the other vehicle will get back into lane?

Eliyahu screamed, "Shema Yisrael", turned towards the right and "felt" the army vehicle flying by, just millimeters away. Just from the air pressure, he almost flew over the cliff. But somehow, none of the three possibilities materialized!

HaKadosh Baruch Hu provided a sweet, fourth alternative: Chayim tovim veshalom. It is hard to explain how.

Here was Eliyahu Zerabi, whose father had died in Iran and mother had migrated to Los Angeles to be near her eight siblings. Not yet digesting the great miraculous salvation, Eliyahu continues on his way. At five o' clock, he is home and his mother calls him from L.A. where it is 7 a.m.

"Eliyahu, what happened?" She inquires.

"What do you mean, Mom? Why do you think something happened?" Eliyahu answers.

"Eliyahu, what happened? I just woke up from a frightening dream. Abba came to me and said, "Eliyahu gave more than a thousand shekel to tzedakah. In that merit, his life was saved! So tell me what happened!"

Eliyahu filled his mother in on the details.

Two Different Generations

In the continuation of the *parashah*, we encounter a large group of people who wish to build a city and a tower and rebel against Hashem. In this instance, Hashem does not destroy them. Instead, He declares that so long as they are united, they will be successful in all their endeavors. So He confuses their languages and disperses them. We see here the tremendous power of unity and working together.

What can we learn from all this? The importance of *chessed* and helping others out. When people hear the word "*chessed*," some begin thinking about large projects to assist the needy of the community. While this is true, we must never forget that "*chessed* begins at home." The Chid"ra writes that the highest level of, "And you should love your friend as yourself," can only be fulfilled with one's spouse. First see to it that your spouse and children have what they need, help them out in all ways. Realize that taking out the garbage is no less of a mitzvah than taking hold of the *lulav* and *etrog* on Sukkot. There are countless of *chessed* opportunities in the home. When done for parents, add the mitzvah of *kibud av v'eim* to the list. Have your home become a *teivah* of *chessed*, a place where peace and brotherhood reside, and then extend outward, enhancing the unity of the community. This will save us from all harm and will hopefully hasten the redemption, speedily, in our days.

Fondly,

Mordechai Malka