



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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Parashat Noah

HAMELECH

Offspring of Noah

The *parashah* begins: These are the *toladot* of Noah. Now, *toladot* usually refers to one's children, but the *pasuk* continues: Noah was a righteous man. He was wholesome in his generations. Noah walked with the Almighty. Only in the next verse does the Torah delineate Noah's children: And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham and Yefet.

Rashi explains that the Torah wishes to teach us that a person's main progeny is his good deeds.

The Medrash Tanhuma says it like this: The fruit of a *tsaddik* is the tree of life (Mishlei 11). Says Rabbi Yehuda: If a person leaves this world childless, he is in anguish and weeps. Hashem will ask him, "Why do you cry? Is it because you had no fruit in this world? You should know that you bore fruit which is better than children."

The man will ask, "*Ribono shel olam*, which fruit did I produce?"

Hashem will respond, "You learned Torah of which it is said: The fruit of the righteous is the tree of life. Also, a person's good deeds are his produce." That is what is being said here: These are the offspring of Noah – Noah himself was a righteous, wholesome man.

Explains Rabbi Tanhuma: Before Noah passed away, he saw the world once again inhabited.

Everyone around was his grandson, great-grandson or great-great-grandson (or even greater!) They were all from him, all seventy nations. Nonetheless, when the Torah speaks of Noah's accomplishments, first and foremost are his own acts of kindness and selflessness.

What was Noah doing for twelve months aboard the *teivah*? He was busy feeding the animals, night and day! What did he feed them? Rabbi Akiva said that he fed every being sweet figs – one food item that everybody likes. But our Sages say – no – he fed each animal its particular food which it is used to eating. So he gave straw to the camels and barley to the donkeys. He had to find out what each animal liked to eat. And he gave it to him.

The animals eat at different times of day and night. So there was Noah, around the clock, hardly getting a wink of sleep, the whole time busy tending to the needs of others.

Now it is most noteworthy that this lesson is taught using the example of Noah. As mentioned, Noah had children and became the ancestor of all of mankind. Had this lesson been taught with a childless man, some may think that it is only words of consolation, not to be taken literally. But since we are dealing with Noah, a father of children, and still our Sages teach that a person's



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good deeds are his main progeny, that really proves the authenticity of the lesson.

Better Than Children

Maharal explains why this is so. When a person has children, there are three partners: Hashem, the father and the mother. We have to admit that Hashem's contribution and share in this partnership is certainly the most significant. But when a person does a good deed, although he certainly needs Hashem's help to get it done, nonetheless, the deed was rooted in the good will and effort of the person, and it is so much more "his" than something like children. Also, "children" are their own entity, outside of the person; but when a person does a good deed or acts with good character traits, he is building and developing himself. The man himself becomes a better person. As such, the accomplishment is rightfully associated with the one who did it, even more than children are to be considered the doing of their parents.

Noah the Pleasant

The Medrash explains Noah's name and how it describes his essence. "Noah" means easygoing and pleasant, and that is exactly what Noah was. His name is repeated in the opening verse, indicating a dual easygoingness. He was easygoing with Hashem and also easygoing with people and animals.

In Avot (3:10), we are taught that when people enjoy someone's company because of his pleasant ways, that is indicative that Hashem is pleased with him as well.

Kindness of Salvation

Why was Noah saved? In the merit of his *chessed*. Hashem had him build a *teivah* and bring in all the animals just so that Noah would be busy that whole year doing kindness all the time. That is what kept him going that year, while *midat hadin* was hard at work outside of the *teivah*.

Homey Hessed

Some people think that what a person does in the confines of his home does not matter so much and what he does for the community – that's called *chessed*. We ought to internalize the truth that *chessed* beings at home, with our family.

There are numerous sources for this. In Ketuvot 50a, one who supports his young children [and who doesn't?] is called someone who "does kindness at all times." The Rambam (Matanot Aniim 7:13) rules that one is obligated to provide for his impoverished relative before allocating charity elsewhere. Bet Yosef (Y.D. 251) rules that a father is obligated to provide for his children who have yet to reach six years of age. Those who are six and older are expected to fend for themselves. If they need assistance, their father is



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performing a *mitsvah* of *tseddakah* when he supports them!

Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 251) sets down certain rules of precedence in allocating one's charity funds, putting relatives before others.

Tana devei Eliyahu (chap. 27) brings the verse which instructs us to share our bread with the poor and not to neglect our less fortunate brethren. Our Sages (ibid.) teach us that a man of means must see to it that his parents have enough to eat and that his siblings also do not lack their basic needs. If he is able, he should go further and care for extended family and then neighbors. The order is clearly delineated.

Pele Yo'etz (Hessed) also speaks out this idea of caring for one's parents and children, then other relatives etc.

When the *mishna* in Avot (1:6) tells us that poor people should be as members of your household, we can also read it in reverse: to treat family members like we treat the poor, making sure to tend to all of their needs.

So Many *Mitsvot*

This being said, a person must set his priorities straight and strive to be pleasant and helpful, first and foremost to his wife and children. There are so many *chessed* opportunities in the home. Instead of viewing them as unwanted chores, let

us see them for what they really are: *mitsvah* opportunities, no less rewarding and exciting than *tefillin*, *kiddush* or *lulav* and *etrog*. Taking out the garbage or washing dishes is a *mitsvah* one should rejoice over. A house which thrives upon *chessed* is a *teivat Noah*, protected from the chaos which is rampant the world over.

Someone who begins marriage seeking ways to make his wife's life more pleasant is starting out on the right foot. He is fulfilling his mission in this world and acting as the Creator acts. He is establishing himself as a giver, and as such, inviting Heavenly protection upon his abode.

Mother Cow

Rav Shalom Schwadron was once taking his child to the doctor. He met up with his *rebbe* who asked him where he was going. He responded, "I am taking my child to the doctor."

The *rebbe* said, "Oh, so the mother cow is taking the baby cow to the doctor."

Reb Shalom was taken aback, until his *rebbe* explained, "Also animals instinctively take care of their young. You could just act as an animal. Or you could rise above that and understand that you are doing a *mitsvah* of Hashem and following in His ways. It is all a question of attitude and perspective. It is up to you if you wish to eternalize the moment or waste it."



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Priorities

Reb Shalom also told the story of the young *avreich*, a grandson of the Chofetz Chaim, who learned in the Lakewood Yeshiva. When he repeatedly showed up late to *Shacharit* and even skipped a few times, the *mashgiach* Reb Nosson asked him why he was not coming to *daven* in *yeshivah*.

The young man explained that he really wanted to *daven* in *yeshiva*, "But what can I do? On my way to *davening*, more often than not, I bump into a woman with a number of children, all of whom need help getting ready in the morning. One needs help getting dressed, another needs to be fed, the baby needs to be held. This woman is not managing on her own. I feel compelled to help her out. By the time I finish, I either get to *yeshiva* late or I just *daven* in a different *minyan*."

"Who is this woman?" inquired Reb Nosson. "Is she a widow or divorcee? Maybe I should be helping her, too?"

"No," the man replied, "she has a husband... and it is I! Yes, it's my wife and I am the only one who can help her function in the pressured hours of the morning rush."

Clean Sink

When Rebbetzin Kanievsky (the wife of the Steipler Gaon) would go to sleep too tired to wash dishes, she would often wake up to a clean

sink, tended to by none other than her *masmid* of a husband, who also knew how to help in the home.

Ignorance is not Bliss

The Maharil Diskin was told of a young man whose intensity and devotion to his Torah studies caused him to practically ignore his wife. The Maharil Diskin invited him to his home, only to ignore him completely for several hours. Eventually, the Maharil Diskin sent for his own wife and conversed with her freely and in a distinctively friendly manner.

He was giving this man a taste of his own medicine, showing him how terrible it feels to be ignored and teaching him that even someone steeped in Torah study must still give his wife the attention she deserves.

Learn from Noah

So let us learn from Noah to be pleasant and helpful. Let us begin our *chessed* on the home front and only thereafter extend outward. If our home becomes a *chessed* station, each mundane act done in order to provide for a smoothly functioning home becomes a *mitsvah*, inviting Divine protection. Our children will learn what *chessed* is all about and we will enjoy protection and bliss.

Shabbat Shalom
Mordechai Malka