



# Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

## RECTIFYING OUR MIDOT

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ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

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ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

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NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

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AVIGAYIL BROIDE ('18)

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As is well known, much can be learned from what seem to be extraneous words or phrases in the Torah. Near the end of this week's parsha we find a peculiar statement, after Shem and Yefet take a garment to cover

their naked father: “[Shem and Yefet] walked backwards... with their faces turned the other way and they did not see the nakedness of their father” (Bereishit 9:23).

The Torah makes it perfectly clear that Shem and Yefet were very careful not to look at their father by saying that they walked backwards with their faces turned away from Noach.

So why does the pasuk need to end by also saying that “they did not see the nakedness of their father”?

It can be argued that this “extraneous phrase” comes to teach us a new concept about positive conduct from the behavior of Shem and Yefet. The Meor Einayim (Parshat Chukat) cites a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov which can shed light on this question: When a person sees an undesirable quality in a colleague, this indicates that there exists within his own self something similar to that undesirable quality. Like a person who looks in a mirror, if his face is clean, when he looks in the mirror he does not see any flaw. If however he sees filth or a blotch in the mirror, it is because his own face is dirty.

This above teaching is informally referred to as the Baal Shem Tov mirror, and while it is similar to the psychological defense mechanism of projection, it is different in that in the latter case, one projects his own negative traits on someone else who does not necessarily possess them.

In Likkutei Sichot (LS v.10, p. 24) an objection is raised to the utilization of the Baal Shem Tov mirror to explain the seemingly superfluous last few words of our pasuk: Can't a person simply see a negative trait in another

# ABOVE THE CALL OF DUTY

ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

THE MIDRASH TEACHES THAT THE WORLD WAS FOUND-ED BECAUSE OF three tzaddikim: Adam, Noach, and Avraham. Noach, the protagonist of this week's parsha, is described by God as "a righteous man, perfect in his generations" (Bereishit 6:9). This is quite a strange way to give a compliment, by praising Noach only in comparison to those around him. Why would God add the last phrase, stating that Noach was perfect "in his generations"?

The Sages say that God's statement seems to imply that Noach would only be righteous in his generation, where everyone else was evil. Hypothetically, according to this logic, if Noach had lived in Avraham's time, he would not have been a great man. The Sages also suggest another, completely opposite, opinion that the phrase "in his generations" actually praises Noach. God was saying that if Noach could live righteously around such horrible people, he would have become even greater if he had lived during a better time.

These two opinions seem to conflict with each other. How can we reconcile this conflict in an attempt to better understand Noach?

Noach followed the commandments and did as God expected of him, nothing more. This is why he is called a "tzaddik", yet he is criticized by our sages because he never stepped out of his comfort zone to go beyond the call of duty. We see how the Torah expertly juxtaposes Noach with Avraham to teach this valuable lesson. While Noach did exactly what was asked of him and nothing more, Avraham went above and beyond whenever possible. This can clearly be seen in Parshat Vayeira with the story of the angels who pay Avraham a visit. Although Avraham was still recovering from his brit milah and Eliezer had not been able to find guests, Avraham still sat outside of his tent waiting to invite guests in.

From this we learn a valuable lesson. Sometimes it may seem easy to do what is asked of us and nothing more, but going above the call of duty elevates a person to an even greater level.

without it implying that he himself possesses a similar negative trait? The response of the Lubavitcher Rebbe is that every event that happens in the world is controlled by hashgacha pratit (Divine Providence). Thus, even recognizing an undesirable quality in another person does not happen by chance, but is ordained from above. Since Hashem does not do anything without a purpose, it must be that a person would be shown a negative trait in another for a reason. Therefore, this event must serve as a lesson, informing a person that he also possesses this negative middah which needs some level of rectification.

Perhaps the true intent in showing a person the suboptimal qualities in his friend is so that he will admonish and help his friend correct and improve his conduct. This is especially relevant, given that it is a mitzvah to do so: "You shall surely rebuke your fellow" (Vayikra 19:17).

We can now explain why the Torah added the phrase, "and they did not see the nakedness of their father," to the end of the pasuk. Not only did Shem and Yefet not see their father's nakedness in a physical sense (as their faces were turned away), but that they did not see or feel any dimension of "nakedness" or fault in their father. Shem and Yefet are thus distinguished from their brother, Cham. Shem and Yefet did not see, while with regard to Cham, it is written: "And Cham... saw" (Bereishit 9:22).

This came as a result of differences in their inner personal characteristics and spiritual levels. "Cham was the father of Canaan," (Bereishit 9:18). and since he himself possessed evil character traits, he saw the evil of Noach's intoxication. Since Shem and Yefet were above this type of evil, they did not see this negative trait.

This provides every one of us with a lesson. When one hears or sees an undesirable quality in another person, he should not speak about it and tell others as Cham did. Furthermore, one should not even think unfavorably about him. Rather, he should contemplate only how he should correct his own faults (and after working on himself he should admonish his friend in a sensitive way, if possible).



# PRIORITIZING CHESED

ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, GOD PLANS TO DESTROY THE world with a flood because of corruption and immorality; He therefore instructs Noah to build a wooden ark for himself and his family. It makes sense that God would instruct Noah to build a large wooden boat for an imminent flood, but perhaps there is a deeper meaning and significance behind what the ark represents.

One of the foundations of the world is kindness. A society will endure if there is kindness, while a society that lacks kindness is destined for failure. True kindness is doing something out of complete care and love, while mercy is doing something simply because you feel bad for someone.

We know Noah's generation was destroyed because of its corruption and immorality, and therefore the ark, the only thing that can save a living creature from the flood, represents what a good world should look like, replete with kindness and avodat Hashem. The ark represents these features because Noah was immersed in chesed the entire time he was on the ark. He obeyed Hashem's commands and showed chesed and kindness to Hashem's creatures, treating them with love and compassion.

By building the ark and living on it for a year, constantly performing acts of kindness for Hashem's creations, Noah was restoring this basic middah of chesed that should be intrinsic within us. It resides at the core of who we are and the values we represent. A nation or society that prioritizes chesed, kindness, and compassion, such as the Jewish people, is a nation that endures throughout history.

# CARING FOR OTHERS

NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT NOACH, NOACH IS considered to be "צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו..." "...a righteous man, perfect in his generation" (Bereishit 6:9). However, this description of Noah seems to disappear later on in the story; when the Torah recounts the destruction of everything after the flood, besides for the

remaining ark and its inhabitants, it states, "And Noah alone remained." Why is Noah not given any title or description, as he was given before, to confirm his greatness? Similarly, many Rabbis explain that Noah was in fact only "perfect" when compared to those in his generation. How are these Rabbis so sure that Noah was not a true צַדִּיק, a righteous person?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin explains that according to the midrash, Noah was held responsible for not influencing the people of his generation. The people of his generation were sinners and, therefore, Hashem commanded Noah to build a teivah over the course of 120 years, giving the people a chance to do teshuva, repentance, with Noah's positive influence. While Noah built the teivah as he was commanded to do, he did not inspire the people in his generation to change their actions. Perhaps this is why his positive description does not last throughout the parsha.

We can learn from Noah's action of building the ark as well as his lack of action in terms of inspiring others. While following Hashem's commands is the right thing to do, it is not enough to just follow the letter of the law; we must think of others as well. Helping others make the right choices and inspiring others through our actions is just as important as following Hashem's commandments. In fact, this idea is evident when the Torah states that we must love others just as much as we love ourselves. We follow Hashem's commandments partially because we understand that He is the Almighty and knows what is best for us. Therefore, if we follow His commandments because it is what is best for us, we should look out for other Jews and help them make the right choices as well. Following Hashem's mitzvot and caring for others helps us to become righteous people in our generation and other generations to come.

# HISTORY OF THE STEAK

AVIGAYIL BROIDE ('18)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, GOD GIVES MAN THE RIGHT to eat animals. The obvious question is why? What was motivating God essentially to give this permission to man?

The Ramban answers that the right was given because man acquired animals by saving them from the

flood. However, just saving them doesn't seem like enough to give man the right to eat them. Instead, it was that in the teiva they would have died a horrible death by the hands of other predators. The fact that man kept these animals safe in the teiva from these predatory animals - when he slaughters them NOW, he gives them a more humane death than they would have otherwise received.

Rav Kook argues that actually this right was given to man as a 'last resort option'; essentially, man has carnivorous desires and would have found other ways to satisfy these desires -- like killing and eating other human beings -- if not allowed to eat animals. In lieu of that, God made a concession to human nature and allowed man to kill and eat animals, although in the future Beit Hamikdash we won't be eating animals anymore.

Rav Medan (Rosh Yeshiva of Gush) adds that this right given to man was given in the context of Noach offering a korban up to Hashem. The blood goes to God and man sort of gets the leftovers. Since Noach was allowed to eat from that korban, man is now regularly allowed to eat meat even when he's not offering a korban to Hashem.

I think there's a really nice message that we can learn from each of these opinions.

The Ramban forces us to question whether, even though we obtained the right to eat animals by saving them on the teiva and treating them more humanely, are we respecting animals? Are we treating them the way they're supposed to be treated? Although we acquired this right from Noach, are we doing our part to maintain this privilege?

I don't think it's something that is obvious or expected, but respecting animals is something that, as a community, we must continue to upkeep and uphold.

Rav Kook's answer forces us to raise the following question: Considering this was a last resort for man, where are we failing? We need to self reflect, can we be doing better? What concessions are we making in our own lives? What can we be improving upon?

Finally, Rav Medan's answer teaches an important lesson as well. Meat and wine give us an added element of happiness. People get way more excited about a piece of steak than a piece of pizza. This extra recognition when we're eating animals should remind us that we are taking part in something greater than ourselves. We are participating in the korban experience, albeit indirectly, elevating our simple steak to a spiritual experience.



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