



October 21, 2023



Parshas Noach

6th of Cheshvan 5784

Fountains of Love

Ever since first grade, we were all taught that Avraham was the first person to recognize Hashem. We were taught that he is the undisputed founder of monotheism. And according to the Rambam in the first perek of Hilchos Avoda Zara, our Morahs weren't wrong; Avraham was, in fact, the first to recognize Hashem. The problem is, asks Reb Yonason Eibshitz, what about Noach? Does it not say, "*Es HaElokim His'halech Noach*"? Wasn't Noach the first to be on Hashem's team? It seems as though Noach was robbed of the "First to Recognize Hashem" award. Why is that?

The Levels of Love

Reb Yerucham Olshin shlita explains that there are two levels of recognition of Hashem. The first level is to see Hashem out in the world, to look outside and get to the unequivocal conclusion that there must be a God Who created and maintains this world. The second level is to recognize Hashem out in the world and be so inspired and so blown away and so filled with awe that one feels the need to spread this recognition to others. You see the Creator and internalize it deeply, to the point where it pains you to see others miss Him. This, says Reb Yerucham, was the fundamental difference between Noach and Avraham. Avraham saw Hashem and ran to spread the news to all. Hosting, teaching, nurturing. Noach saw Hashem but did nothing about it. He saw the power of the Creator but shared it with no one.

In the second perek of Maseches Eduyos, it says that the mishpat of the Dor Hamabul was for twelve months. Reb Dovid Soloveitchik asks how this agrees with the pesukim, which say that rain only fell for forty days. Was the world judged for forty days or twelve months? He answers by saying that the Mishnah is not referring to the judgment of the world, which in fact took place for forty days; the Mishnah is referring to the judgment of Noach. The entirety of the twelve months that Noach was in the teiva he was being punished. For what? He should have spread the light. He should have been mikarev his neighbors. He should have been so overflowing with love of Hashem and His Glory that he should have begged his friends to abandon their foolish ways and come see the truth. Not doing so warranted his twelve-month punishment.

The Alshich adds something fascinating. He asks: why did Hashem choose to save Noach specifically with a teiva? Why not allow him an oasis of normalcy, as Bnei Yisroel had during the Makkos in Mitzrayim? Why a teiva? He explains that this was middah kinaged middah. Noach had kept to himself instead of teaching and inspiring and sharing with his community; likewise, his punishment was utter isolation from humanity, closed off in a floating prison. The Alshich points out that this is what the pasuk means when it says Asei **Lecha** Teiva. Make for yourself a teiva. A teiva that will not only save you physically, but also remind you that you sinned greatly spiritually. This, says Reb Yonason Eibshitz, is what the Torah means when it says "*Eileh Toldos Noach: Noach Ish Tzadik*". Meaning to say, that's it. That's all he has to show of himself. No talmidim. No geirim. No students. No inspired neighbors. No enlightened college kids. No enthused at-risk teens. He lived, he was righteous, and he died.

The lesson is obvious. By ignoring our neighbors, or by being lackadaisical in our outreach, or harboring dismissive attitudes towards unaffiliated people, we not only cause them to lose out; we lose out ourselves. We demonstrate that we are only on the level of Noach and not that of Avraham. The parsha serves as a reminder that life is short. We can either live it in our cocoons, or we can live on fire, spreading Hashem's goodness wherever our life path takes us.