

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on Parshas Noach with a backdrop of today

This week we read Parshas Noah - government backdrop, threat of nuclear war, chemical weapons, terrorism in Kenya mall and more - , Is it worth asking ourselves, if we had been living in Noah's time, what message would we have taken from watching Noah build an ark for 120 years?

Let's imagine every morning, I pull out of my driveway and there is Noah, building this huge ark. I say good morning and Noah, like he does every day, tells me that there is going to be a flood and the world is going to be destroyed and that we can avoid it if we do teshuva, if we reform our ways and return to Hashem. No one else is building an ark. Everyone else is just going about life as usual, as corrupt as it might have been, with whatever perversions, immoral acts, sins and crimes we are told existed.

What would have made me believe that Noah had been told by Hashem that the world would be destroyed and that what I did could possibly avert such a thing? On the face of it, Noah looks like the one who is out of sync with reality. What kind of badgering did Noah take for building the ark, is it known? The Torah says that until the water was ankle deep, Noah did not go onto the ark, hoping that Hashem would forgive everyone. Did Noah really believe that Hashem would destroy the world? Do we believe that Hashem will fulfill His promise of redemption, turn Olam Haze into a redeemed world?

These questions entered my mind today because every day we pray that Hashem redeem us. What is that going to look like? Chazal tell us there will be a war of Gog and Magog. There are visions of earthquakes, natural disasters, strange cloud coverings and more. As we see that we are living chelev Moshlach, do we go about our lives, or are we trying to return to Hashem in whatever way we know how?

Most people are good and do good. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we all find areas where we can do better. What stands in the way of us tackling our character traits?

We just came through Elul and Tishrei and if we did the work of these months, we may have some insight into our patterns that could be improved. Progress depends on seeing ourselves as fundamentally good, despite our repeated problematic areas. Believing in our essential goodness, the goodness inherent in having a tzelem elokim and that being our true essence, is crucial because, if we listen to the undermining messages that our faults are beyond our grasp to tackle or that we can not really ever change, a part of our divine soul becomes trapped in the prison of that deception.

And this is the case for many people. Many people just live with their souls trapped in a negative pattern, hurting the ones they love, succumbing to the same self-destructive habits and more.

All because we believe a lie. And that lie is that we are our thoughts or our character traits or our cumulative life circumstances. We are none of those things. We are a speaking being made b'tzelem elokim

with real free will to choose when Hashem tosses our way tests and challenges.

Let's say a person has a short temper and is easily agitated to be sharp with words. Such a person might accept a label of being an angry person or a rude person. Yet that is not really true - the person is either

- a. unaware that the strength behind the reaction can be folded into something that is Hashem's attribute or will and that through free willed choice the strength can be unified with Hashem and bring blessing to the world.
- b. unaware that NOT rectifying a negative trait is destructive not only to the person while in this world but for all eternity.

We are here to elevate the mundane to the holy. This is what we do when we say brachas. It is within the gift of speech for us to do this. It is the reason that we are given speech and free will, to help form light in the heavens and create positive influence.

What is holding us back? We have the Torah. We know how to pray. Why do we languish in the negative expressions of earth, wind, water and fire when we have free will to choose positive expression?

We have an immense soul created in the image of Hashem upon which Hashem bestows free will and speech for us to lovingly bring Hashem's attributes into the world. Hashem seeks vessels through which He can be in this world. Where are we holding in terms of finding that to be our highest priority?

When we have a daily involvement with cheshbon hanefesh, review of our day, and a private prayerful introspection discussing our lives with Hashem out of love and desire to do His will, we are able to move within ourselves, to gain clarity.

May we look at the times we live in and see that Hashem is being very patient with us, giving us messages that, if we raise our eyes and remember that our true essence is that we are tzelem elokim and our choice and effort to bring those characteristics into the world, lead us to returning to Him, to be His vessels here in the world, to do His Will. Our existence in this world is at His Will. With love in our hearts, let us all bravely see a place to begin, to use free will and words to bring the Shechina from exile in the kelipas to unification with Hashem. All it takes is an honest portion of self control mixed with love of Hashem and slice of fear of what might happen if we rebel against Hashem. Easy recipe. Hard to develop the ingredients. But doable. Not impossible. With free will we can choose and make the effort. Success is in Hashem's hands.

May we have clarity so that we may draw closer in characteristics to Hashem and to His Will. And may Hashem have mercy upon us and redeem us b'ahava.