

Selflessness

P. Noah

1 *Sichas Mussar - R. Shmelovitz*
כי מי נח זאת לי (ישעיהו נ"ד:ט).
For this is to me as Noah's flood (Yeshayahu 54:9).

C hazal interpret this verse as implying that the flood was caused by Noah's shortcomings. The shortcoming alluded to is that Noah did not pray for the world to be spared the ravages of the flood and was therefore responsible for its destruction. Why, indeed, didn't Noah beseech God not to obliterate all of mankind? Noah slaved and labored day and night with superhuman effort and endurance to tend to and to preserve the animals in the ark in order to ensure the continuity of the world [see *Tanchuma Noah* 9]. Could it be that he did not care about the rest of humanity?

One could possibly answer that Noah's decision not to pray stemmed not from a lack of concern for humanity but rather from the knowledge that his prayers would not be answered. This reply could be supported by *Rashi* (*Bereishis* 18:32) quoting our Sages who state that Avraham did not pray that Sodom and Gemorrah be spared in the merit of eight people, for the occurrence of the flood showed that the merit of eight people, i.e., Noah, his three sons and their wives, did not suffice to save the world from destruction. The question then really is: Since Noah knew that his prayers would not

be answered, why was he held responsible for not praying? Why demand of him an exercise in futility?

3 **m**an, by nature, is a selfish creature. Even in his relationships with others he tends to focus primarily on himself

or, at most, on his self-colored perception of his fellow. "Love" is the endeavor to transcend this intrinsic selfishness and truly relate to one's fellow, to be sensitive to and devoted to his needs as an individual distinct of oneself and one's own stake in the relationship.

Love is not only about caring and giving but also about influencing. When the Torah commands "Love your fellow as yourself," it does so in the context of the obligation to rebuke him if he is behaving in a negative and destructive manner—the immediately preceding verse reads, "Do not hate your brother in your heart; rebuke your fellow..."² No one would stand by as a loved one suffers hunger or is threatened by violence; no less so, if one sees his fellow suffering from spiritual malnutrition or moral blindness, he must make every effort to reach out to him, to enlighten him, to offer guidance and assistance. Thus the Torah instructs, "Do not hate your brother in your heart": do not succumb to the all-too-prevalent reaction to the wrongdoing of others—contempt for the "sinner." Instead of despising him, respond with concrete and pragmatic steps to cure him of his spiritual ills. Rebuke him, by word and example, with sensitivity and loving concern, and assist him to rise to his true, quintessential state of goodness.

2 *The Inside Story - Ed. R. Tauber - pg 15*

A And Enoch walked with G-d. Then he was no longer, for G-d had taken him.

Genesis 5:24

B For the hundred and twenty years that Noah built the ark, he rebuked the people of his generation to return to G-d.

Midrash Tanchuma, Noah 5

C And Abraham approached [G-d]: "...If there be fifty righteous men in the city, would You also destroy and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous that are therein? It behooves You not to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked... shall the judge of the universe not act justly?"

Genesis 18:23-25

D And Moses returned to G-d and said: "...Now, if You forgive their sin—; if You will not, erase me from the book which You have written."

Exodus 32:31-32

4 The selflessness and the influence of love are proportionate to each other. As this overview will demonstrate, the more selfless are your relationships with your fellow, the more extensive your influence upon him will be. Conversely, the more your vision of your fellow and your involvement with him is defined by your self and its self-colored perceptions, the less he will respond to your efforts on his behalf.

5 An exploration of the history of humanity, as recounted in the Torah, reveals four figures who personified four different points of reference on the relationship between self and fellow. Each of these individuals was considered the most righteous of his generation. Thus, their lives can be seen to reflect four stages in the spiritual development of humanity—four stages in the movement from the instinctive selfhood toward the complete abnegation of self and self-interest in relating to others.

6

The first of these four outstanding individuals was Enoch, a great-great-great-grandson of Adam, who was born in the year 622 from creation (3139 before the common era). By his time, humanity had abandoned the One G-d of their fathers and had succumbed to idolatry and pagan perversity; only Enoch still "walked with G-d."³ But Enoch's righteousness was wholly selfish: he was preoccupied only with the refinement and perfection of his own spiritual self. The Midrash even relates that, for many years, he disassociated himself from his corrupt generation and secluded himself in a cave.

Not only did Enoch fail to have a lasting impact on his society, but he was ultimately in danger of being influenced by their corrupt behavior. This is why Enoch died at the "tender young age" of 365 (compared with the 900-year life spans of his contemporaries): "G-d took him to Himself" before his time, lest the only righteous man of the generation also be lost.⁴ For such is the relationship of an individual with his environment: there is no sustained equilibrium. Where there is contact there is a flow, in one direction or the other; one either influences his society or is influenced by it.⁵

7

Several generations later we encounter another righteous man in a corrupt generation: Noah, builder of the ark and regenerator of humanity after the Flood.

In Noah, we find the first stirrings of a departure from self to improve and rehabilitate one's fallen fellow. In the year 1536 from creation (2225 BCE) G-d told Noah that "the end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence" and that He therefore intends to "bring a deluge of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh" and start anew with Noah and his family.⁶ Noah is instructed to build an ark so that they may survive the Flood. Our sages relate that Noah worked on the ark's construction a full one hundred and twenty years; all this time, he called out to his generation to mend its ways and avoid catastrophe.⁷

However, the Zohar criticizes Noah for the fact that, despite his efforts, he did not pray for the salvation of his generation, unlike Abraham and Moses who pleaded with G-d to spare the wicked.⁸ This implies that, ultimately, it did not matter to Noah what became of them. Had he truly cared, he would not have sufficed with doing his best to bring them to repent but would have implored the Almighty to repeal His decree of destruction—just as one who is personally threatened would never say, "Well, I did my best to save myself," and leave it at that; but would beseech G-d to help him.

8 In other words, Noah's involvement with others was limited to his sense of what he ought to do for them, as opposed to a true concern for their well-being. His "self" had sufficiently broadened to include the imperative to act for the sake of another, recognizing that the lack of a social conscience is a defect in one's own character; but he fell short of transcending the self to care for others beyond the consideration of his own righteousness.

9

This also explains a curious aspect of Noah's efforts to reach out to his generation. When the Flood came, Noah and his family entered the ark—alone. His 120-year campaign yielded not a single baal teshuvah (repentant)! Perhaps public relations was never Noah's strong point, but how are we to explain the fact that, in all this time, he failed to win over a single individual?

But in order to influence others, one's motives must be pure; in the words of our sages, "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart."⁹ Deep down, a person will always sense whether you truly have his interests at heart or you're filling a need of your own by seeking to change him. If your work to enlighten your fellow stems from a desire to "do the right thing"—to observe the mitzvot to "love your fellow as yourself" and "rebuke your fellow"—but without really caring about the result, your call will be met with scant response. The echo of personal motive, be it the most laudable of personal motives, will be sensed, if only subconsciously, by the object of your efforts, and will ultimately put him off.

10 *Sichos Mussar*

To answer this we must examine another perplexing statement of Chazal, that three people were involved in formulating the Egyptian decree against the Jewish people. Bilaam conceived the plan, Iyov kept silent and Yisro protested and subsequently fled.

בְּלָעַם שִׁעֵץ נְהַרְג, אִיּוֹב שִׁשְׁתָּק נִדוֹן בְּיִסְרוּרִים, יִתְרוֹ שִׁבְרָח זָכוּ
מִכְּנִי כְּנִי שֶׁיִּשְׁבְּנוּ בְּלִשְׁכַת הַגְּזִיזִית (סוֹטָה י"א ע"א)
*Bilaam who devised it was slain [in battle], Iyov who
silently acquiesced was afflicted with sufferings and
Yisro who fled merited having his children sit in the
Chamber of the Hewn Stones [the Sanhedrin] (Sotah
11a).*

Why did Iyov deserve to be so terribly afflicted on account of his silence? Yisro, who did protest, was singularly unsuccessful and worse, yet he had to flee. Iyov would have accomplished nothing by speaking out, so why was he punished for not doing something whose effectiveness would be nil in any case?

11 The understanding of this is that the purpose of the suffering that Iyov underwent was not solely to punish him, but rather to teach and point out to him his failings and wrongdoings. [Punishment in general is to be understood in this manner.] True, had he protested the decree against Israel, his advice would not have been taken and his protests would have been of no avail. But neither, for that matter, are a suffering person's moans of any help, yet he continues to groan and cry out in pain. If Iyov kept silent, it was an indication that Israel's suffering didn't really bother him. *As es tut vay shreit men — "When in agony, one cries out."* If he would truly have felt Israel's pain and affliction, he would have cried out in protest, much as he did for his own suffering. His silence then betrayed his lack of care and empathy, and this was the lesson that was taught to him through his own pain and suffering.

12 This too, was the case with Noah. Had Noah been concerned with the destruction of the world and its plight, he would have prayed regardless of whether he thought his prayers would succeed or not. The fact that he did not pray for his generation revealed a lack of concern for its destruction. This is why it was named Noah's flood, decrying this very lack of concern.

other."¹⁰ After coming to recognize the Creator, he devoted his life to bringing the belief and ethos of a One G-d to his generation. Wherever he went, he "caused G-d's name to be known in the world."¹¹ Abraham also concerned himself with the more mundane needs of his fellows, offering his tent as an open house of refreshment and lodging for all desert wayfarers, regardless of spiritual station.¹²

The selflessness of Abraham's concern for his fellow is demonstrated by his daring intervention on behalf of the five sinful cities of the Sodom Valley. G-d had decided to destroy these cities for their wicked ways. Abraham petitioned G-d on their behalf, using the strongest terms to demand of G-d that he spare these cities for the sake of the few righteous individuals they might contain. "It behooves You not to do such a thing," he challenged G-d, "to slay the righteous with the wicked... Shall the judge of the universe not act justly?"¹³ Abraham put his own spiritual integrity at risk for the sake of the most corrupt of sinners—he was prepared to incur G-d's wrath upon himself, giving precedence to their physical lives over his own relationship with the Almighty.

And because people sensed that he had their own good, and only their own good, at heart, they responded. When Abraham and Sarah left Charan for the Holy Land, they were joined by the "souls which they had made in Charan"—the community of men and women who had rallied to their cause.¹⁴

But even Abraham's love is still not the ultimate. It took another four centuries for the epitome of selfless devotion to one's fellow to emerge in the person of Moses.

Abraham's virtue over Noah was that his objective in relating to others lay not in realizing the potential of his social self (as was the case with Noah) but in achieving the desired result: to transform their behavior and character, bringing to light their good and perfect essence. But therein also lies the limitations of Abraham's love: ultimately, Abraham's kindness had an ulterior motive. True, it was not a personal motive; true, it was a motive that spells the recipient's ultimate good and is consistent with the recipient's true self; but it was an ulterior motive nonetheless.

Our sages describe how Abraham's hospitality was but a means to achieve his goal of converting his guests to a belief in G-d.¹⁶ The same is true of Abraham's valiant prayer on behalf of the Sodomites. He beseeched G-d to spare them because of the righteous in their midst—as long as righteous individuals remain in a city, there is hope for the wicked as well.¹⁷ On a deeper level, he was referring to the "righteous one" within the wicked person, his inner potential for good; spare them, Abraham was saying, perhaps the good in them will triumph yet. As soon as he became aware that the wicked of Sodom were beyond hope, he ceased his prayers.

Such love and concern—for the sake of the potential good that one sees in another—is a love that is tainted, however minutely, with selfishness: one is relating to one's fellow not as one's fellow sees himself, but with an eye to one's own vision of him. This allows for a reaction on his

part (expressed, unexpressed or even unconscious) that "You don't care for me as I am, only for what you wish to make of me. So you don't really care about me at all." True, one's only desire is to reveal the other's essential self; but this is a deeper, still unrealized, self. One's love fails to address the other as he now, expressly is focusing instead on one's knowledge of what he latently is and what he can and ought to make of himself.

20 In contrast, Moses' love for his people was utterly selfless. His was an unconditional love, one that is unassuming of what they ought to be or what they are on a deeper, yet unrealized level. He loved them as they were, and did everything in his power to satisfy their needs, both material and spiritual.

When Moses pleaded with G-d on behalf of the worshippers of the Golden Calf, he did not say "forgive them because they will repent" or "forgive them for they carry great potential," only "forgive them. And if You won't, erase me from Your Torah."¹⁸ Either You accept the sinner as he is, or put together a nation and Torah without this Moses.

21 The difference between Moses and his predecessors is also reflected in the extent of their influence on their fellows. Enoch, with his wholly self-directed righteousness, had no influence, and was himself susceptible to influence. Noah, who extended himself to his fellows—but only because he recognized that concern for one's fellow is an integral part of a perfect self—was not influenceable,¹⁹ but did not influence. Abraham's teaching and instruction, free of such personal bias, was embraced by multitudes of followers; but since even Abraham's efforts fell short of the pure definition of selflessness, his influence was correspondingly limited. Today, we have no traceable heirs to Abraham's

disciples (what, indeed, ever became of the "souls they had made in Charan"?). But the effects of Moses' utterly selfless love are eternal: his guidance and leadership of his people yielded a nation whose endurance and unbroken continuity, to this very day, defies all laws of history.

וזהו מה שאמרו חז"ל (מ"ד ר"ש ויקרא) "יעשר שמות היו לו למשה רבינו, א"ל הקב"ה למשה, חייך מכל שמות שנקרא לך, איכני קורא אלא בשם שקראתך בתי בת פרעה, ותקרא את שמו משה", ובמקום אחר אמרו (שמ"ד א' כ"ו) "מיכר אתה למך שכרן של גופלי חסדים, שמכל שמות שהיו לו, לא נקבע בו שם בכל התורה אלא כמו שקראתך בתי בת פרעה".

והנה כל שם ושם שנקרא בו משה רבינו בא לבטא ולתאר את מעלתו וגדלותו של משה, "ירד, שהוריד את התורה מלמעלה למטה, ד"א שהוריד את השכינה, אביגדור אביהם של גודרים, חבר, שחיבר את ישראל לאביהם שבשמים, אבי סוכו, אביהו של נביאים שסוכים ברוח הקודש" וכ"ו, (ע"י ויק"ר שם) כל אחד משמותיו נמצא צד אחר מגדלותו, וכדי להקיף את רום מעלת משה רבינו צריך עשרה שמות.

אך ראה זה פלא, שמו משה שנקבע בו בכל התורה מה הוא אומר? "כי מן המים משיתיהו", ומה גדולה יש בכך, ואם אמנם יש כאן שבח על בתי בת פרעה, מה לזה ולעצם מהותו של משה.

אלא הן הדברים, מכח מסירות נפש של בתי בת פרעה, שהמרתה פי אביה, צילה את משה נגד גזירת פרעה, ומכח גמילות החסד שגמלה עמו בגדלה אותו. קרבה ובמסירות קיבל משה רבינו אל תוך נפשו ובשרו את הכחות הללו, ועל ידם

נתעלה והוכשר להיות גואל ומושיען של ישראל, כי בהקרבה ובמס"י"ן ניהל את צאן לתרו בתחילה, ובהקרבה ובמס"י"ן הושיע אח"כ את ישראל, בין בעמודו לפני פרעה ובין בעליתו למרום וכל ארבעים שנה במדבר היו חילו וצופים הפקרת נפשו עבור ישראל, מסירות נפש תמידית עבור כל אחד ואחד מישראל עד לאמירת "ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת".

כל זאת היה טבוע בבפשו והתפתח בו מן הגרעין של המסייב שהשקיעה בו בת"י בת פרה במשחה אותו מן המים, על כן נקבע בו השם משה יותר מכל עשר שמות שהיו לו, כי שם זה ממצה את גדולת משה רבינו יותר מכל השמות, וזהו שכרו של גומלי חסדים, שהחסד עושים, עושה פירות, ומי שגמלו עמו חסד, על שם החסד הוא נקרא ושמו חי וקיים לעד, כשמו של משה רבינו גואלן של ישראל.

25 Shabbat Shirim - R. Miller - pg 14

וישלח את העורב ויצא ושוב עד יבושת המים מעל הארץ
"And he sent forth the raven, which went out to and fro, until the water was dried up from the earth".¹
As the flood subsided, Noah sent out a raven to see if the earth was yet inhabitable.

Rashi quotes two Aggadic comments on this verse, both of which require elucidation. The first concerns the phrase 'to and fro' which is interpreted as going around and about the ark in circles. The raven did not go on its errand to seek out dry land, says the Gemara,² because it suspected Noah of designs on its mate. The obvious question is how Noah, the very emblem of morality in his generation, could conceivably have been suspected of such a perverted desire.

26 But the raven would have returned to take advantage of the benevolence of Noah even if it had found a place to rest. Then why send it? The Midrash¹⁰ on the verse emphasizes the question: וישלח את העורב. הה"ד שלח חשך ויחשיך 'If one sends darkness, it induces greater darkness'. This is intended to imply that one should not send an unworthy messenger, since such a messenger never enlightens the sender by bringing back a true message. How, then, could Noah have expected an answer from the cruel and unclean raven?

27 God. The following dialogue is recorded in the Midrashic anthology 'Yalkut Reuveni':

אמר רבי חייא למה שלח העורב? רמה הקב"ה שהוא רחמן נהפך לאכזרי, כמו עורב. א"ר יוסי והא כתיב איש צדיק המים והיאך הטיח דברים כלפי מעלה? אמר ר' חייא, מרוב צערו דתנו אין דנין את האדם על צערו
R. Hiya said - Why did he send the raven? As an indication that God who is merciful had become cruel like a raven. R. Yose said - But it is written (of Noah) 'a righteous, perfect man', so how could he address an accusation against God? R. Hiya said - Because of his great distress, since we have learnt, that man is not judged (for his words) in distress.¹³

Such was Noah's motive in sending the raven - he was complaining to the Almighty Himself.

28 Nonetheless, Noah was chided by God for his belated concern for mankind, as we read in a subsequent passage in the same Midrash, on the verse: ויצא נח ובניו ואשתו ונשי בניו אתו

"And Noah went out (from the ark), and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him."¹⁴ Our Rabbis taught - What did God reply to Noah? When he went out of the ark and saw the world destroyed he began to weep. 'Master of the World,' he cried, 'Thou art called Merciful. Why didst thou not have mercy on Thy creatures?' God replied to him: 'Foolish shepherd! Now you have spoken thus, but not when I told you that I was about to bring a flood upon the earth ... As soon as you heard that you would be saved in the ark, the destruction of the world no longer troubled your heart ...' On perceiving this, Noah at once offered sacrifices to God.¹⁵

4 The psychological insight of this Midrash is of general validity. It was Noah's own guilty conscience which led him subconsciously to accuse another, in this case God, of a

וועפ"י האמור נחזור לענין שפתחנו בו, התיבה שנצטווה נח לעשות, לא היתה מקום מחסה ממי המבול גרידא, אלא נראה שהי' עלינו לבנות בנין של הצלה, והיי' תיבה שהי' טבוע בה כח גואל ומושיע, והוא ע"י שהי' נח עוסק וטורח בבנינה מאה ועשרים שנה מתוך מסירות נפש כנגד רשעי הדור, ויחד עם המסייב יושקעו בתיבה הקריאה והדרישה לתשובה מדרכיהם הרעים, כל זה יכנס ויחדור לעצם גופה של התיבה ותהפוך עי"ז למבצר הצלה לנח ובניו.

במה דברים אמורים, אם יעסוק בכך נח בכבודו ובעצמו, הוא נח שמצא חן בעיני ד' להצילו מכל בני דורו רק הוא יוכל להטביע בתיבה סגולה ישועה והצלה, אבל אין אחר מלבד נח יוכל לבנות תיבה עם כח זה כשם שאין משענתו של גיחזי מסוגלת להחיות מתים, והוא שאמר ר' יודן "אם צדיקים הם, אטריח עלינו לעשות תיבות הרבה" "עליו" דוקא, הוא ולא אחר, וזה הי' קושי שלא הי' יכול נח לעמוד בו.

fault in himself. This accords with the famous Talmudic maxim.

*'Whoever disqualifies, disqualifies with his own blemish.'*¹⁶

כל הפוסל במומו פוסל.

29 Using this same maxim, the Maharshah¹⁷ explains the raven's suspicion of Noah. The raven itself, according to the Gemara, did not adhere to the prohibition against co-habitation with its mate during the flood. The reason for the prohibition was that those who were safe should not indulge in their own pleasures while the rest of the world was in the throes of destruction. The raven, a symbol of cruelty and unenlightened self-interest, was not concerned at the sufferings of the outside world and transgressed the prohibition. Having itself sinned in this manner, it at once suspected Noah too of sinful lust, though as a matter of fact Noah was the only man free from such guilt and had been chosen for this reason to be saved. Similarly we find Korach accusing Moses and Aaron of lording it over the people of God, though in fact Moses and Aaron were the humblest of men, and it was Korach himself who sought honour and distinction.

מה דבליבך על רחמך מה דבליביה עלך.

*"Thoughts which lie in your own heart concerning others you are apt to impute to those others."*¹⁸

A person's bitterness at his own fate and his criticism of the characters of others often stem from his unwillingness to probe himself. Instead of seeing his own fault in others or blaming God, let him examine himself honestly and mend his own ways. Then he will be happier in himself, without the frustration that made him bitter against God and man.

קשט עצמך ואחר כך קשט אחרים.

*"Right yourself first and afterwards right others"*¹⁹ is an old Rabbinic adage.

30 - This Way Up - Rebetzin Heller - pg 41

We tend to resist moving beyond our middos comfort zone. The almost paranoiac fear of being taken advantage of is one of the

most pervasive dreads of twentieth-century secular society. The hidden suspicion that lending a neighbor an egg may (Heaven forbid) lead to lending a cup of sugar, and from there the possibilities are unlimited, has led to a certain reluctance for some people to develop relationships with their neighbors.

certainly an uphill battle for any couple to maintain a reasonable level of *shalom bayis* (let alone the love, brotherhood, peace, and companionship we wish them at their *sheva berachos*) when apprehension and fear of being taken advantage of replace trust in the marriage. The same suspicion results in taking measures to avoid being "too good." The fear of being "too self-protective" is heard with far less frequency.

What are we actually afraid of? After all, we can always lend the egg and stop at the fragile and priceless family heirlooms. It is possible to go as far assuming that an error on the side of giving may result in being brought closer to each other, which is what we want most deeply inside. At worst, the possibility of responding self-protectively can always be reserved for the far less likely situation of genuinely unhealthy imbalance (which in marriage would, of course, need the serious counsel of an experienced spiritual guide rather than a self-prescribed double dose of inflexibility).

32 The fear is that somehow we will lose ourselves. Our sense of our own significance on a deep and authentic level has been so degraded by our times and our insecurity. The times in which we live are so superficial and consumer-oriented that giving away anything tangible at all leaves one feeling as though he has somehow compromised his value as a person. After all, if his worth as a person can be determined by possessions, he would need a very good reason to part with them. In a similar vein, if his significance to his spouse is measured by how much the other gives rather than how much he gives his spouse, then the smallest compromise is a degradation.

* The fact is, of course, that our human worth is determined neither by possessions nor by the ability to dominate. It is resolved day by day as we choose to give the divine spark within us articulation. We can't lose ourselves. The more we suppress the side of ourselves that is the most authentic and enduring. When we let go

of this fear, we can truly be ourselves.

The nature of fire is to ascend to its source. The core of the *middah* of fire is our longing for significance. Its negative manifestation is arrogance, which is, as we know, far too often the fruit of insecurity in one's sense of significance. Invariably, anger is an inseparable partner of insecurity, as any affront is seen as a statement about one's lack of significance. This leads to an overdeveloped sensitivity to one's own "piece of the pie." Any insult, no matter how minor, is a slur on one's importance. The only way the insatiable need for ascent can be assuaged, even briefly, is by momentary dominance over others. The fear of being "less" than anyone else can lead even to hating those who are in any sense gifted or superior to us.

36 The positive manifestation of this *middah* is humility. The fire in one's character can be redirected, and one's sense of meaning and significance can be defined by the degree to which one is truly aware of the other people with whom one is interacting. Being there in the fullest sense for the other person validates one's own significance. Learning to see others in this light causes one to replace anger and envy with responsiveness.

ועל כן נח אמנם רבו זכויותיו, ואשר אנו מזכירין זכותו בתפלת ד'ה שלנו אלא שלא גדל, והעיקר שצריך לגדול ולהביא גידולי גידולין, ומזה עלינו לדעת שכל מה שאנו משיגים בתורה, ואפילו במשהו, הרי שזה צריך להיות כלי והכנה להתקדמות ולא להשאיר באופן פשוט ולהצטמצם, וכמו שאומרים בשם הסבא מקלם זיע"א שאמר לתלמידיו: "ילדים, אל תחיו באופן פשוט" שאם תחיו "פשוט" תשארו "פשוטים", וזהו המציאות, דאף שמקיימים מצוות ומתפללים, אולם מ"מ נשארים פשוטים כל החיים, ועלינו תמיד לשאוף לא להשאיר פשוטים, ושכל לימוד ותפילה וקיום מצוות יהיו כלי והכנה לגדלות והתרוממות.

The Talmud tells us that as a reward for moving beyond the parameters of one's character traits, Hashem forgives all of one's transgressions. To understand this better, let us take a deeper look at how we define ourselves.

Once the surface is scratched, we come to understand that we are far more than the sum total of our possessions. We also realize that we are similarly not defined by the degree to which we can preserve ourselves by retreating from giving. What is left under the surface is the stuff from which our characters are formed: our *middos*.

* The *middos* are the means of getting to know the spark of Hashem within us. They are the foundation from which all of our access to the higher part of us stems.

34 In *Tanya*, the author explains

the nature of our *middos* by using the paradigm of the physical body. The body is physically composed of the four elements - fire, wind, water, and earth; from them the limbs and organs of the body are formed. They mold the body's potential, both for health and for illness. Similarly, there are four spiritual elements that form the basis of all of one's *middos*. These elements can be used in many ways to create spiritual health or to do the opposite.

בין המצוות - הן נאמן ב'ן - צ"ח

37 איתא במדרש: "אמר רבי ברכיה חביב משה מנח, נח משנקרא איש צדיק נקרא איש אדמה, אבל משה משנקרא איש מצרי נקרא איש אלוקים" (בר"ה, לו, ג).

והנה, גבי משה רבינו שאומר המדרש שהיה בתחילה "איש מצרי", הרי פשיטא שכבר "בהתחלה" זו היה בו את הדרגה של "איש אלוקים". ומסתבר שכן להיפך גבי נח. שאין כוונת חז"ל לומר שמתחילה היה נח איש צדיק ואח"כ נפל מדרגתו ונעשה איש אדמה, אלא שבאיש צדיק זה שבשבילו נברא העולם היה כלול איש האדמה.

ופירוש הדב, שאדם לא נברא בשביל שיעמוד במקום אחד, ויסודו של האדם הרי הוא "מהלך" ולא עומד במקומו, וצריך לזוז לא לגדול ולהתעלות בלי הרף, ובדרגה הכי קטנה צריך כבר להיות היסוד של הגידול. ואם ח"ו אין את זה, והוא לא יכול להתעלות על מדרגתו הרי שזה גנאי. ותתכן שזהו הפירוש של "יש דורשין לגנאי" (ר"ש) ריש פרשת נח, ועי' מדר' פ' ל' אות ט' בדבור של גדולים לא היה נחשב, דלעומת דורו היה צדיק, אולם לא היה התכלית של האדם, כיון שאינו ראוי לעלות ולהתעלות. ויש דורשין לשבח" (שם) דאע"פ שהיה בדור חרב ומושחת שכוה, אף שהיה חסר לו הכח של העליה והגידול, מ"מ היה "איש צדיק", הרי שיש גם מקום לדרוש לשבח וב' הדברים נכונים, דהנך ב' הנקודות היו אצלו.

וכתב ה"ספורנו" על הפסוק "ולשם יולד גם הוא אבי כל בני עבר" (בראשית, י"ב א) היינו שהיה זה שלימד את כולם להכיר את השי"ת והשגחתו והנהגת השי"ת בבריאה, ולכן זכה להקים עולם ומלואו, את אברהם אבינו ע"ה וכלל ישראל. ולנח היה חסר יסוד זה על אף היותו איש צדיק ועל אף הזכויות הרבות שלו, שהרי זכה להציל את כל הבריאה, והיה בזה מסירות נפש עצומה, ואם פעם אחת איחר במשהו הרי שקיבל עונשו, ולא היה יתכן לעבור כל זה אלא בסיעד עצומה. וכן זכה לכריתת ברית עם השי"ת, וזה הכל כתי לבנות בריאה חרשה והיא קיום ציווי ה' והקרבת קורבנות, והרי שזכה להיות כמו אבות העולם. אולם מכיון שלא זכה להמשיך את הלימוד לאחרים הרי ש"החל" נח איש האדמה.

לעצמו וגם בשביל הדור. ואלו נח הרי שיותר מבני ביתו לא זכה להציל עמו, והיינו שהיה חסר לו לימוד בשביל הדור. וגם בשביל עצמו זה חסרון שהרי עשה עצמו חולין.

שזה נעשה חלקו, ונעשה "איש האדמה" ונתחדש מושג של "בן נח" - היינו איש אדמה בלי התעלות.