

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Noach  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Parashat Noach – The size of the Ark

In this week's Parasha of Noach we read about Hashem's commandment to Noach to build the Ark. Hashem provided Noach with detailed and specific measurements for the Ark. It was to be 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, 30 cubits tall, and the roof of the ark sloped upward to one cubit so that the rain would run off. The ark was a large structure, but it would need to hold samples of every living creature, including big animals like elephants, as well as a year's supply of food. Clearly the ark was not large enough to carry such a load and it was a miracle that everything could fit. So why did Hashem provide Noach with these specifications? The miracle could just as easily have taken place in an ark with smaller dimensions.

There are a number of answers provided to this question. Let's start with a more mystical approach. The Megeid Yosef<sup>1</sup> provides us with a kabbalistic answer in the name of his grandfather Rabbi Leib Sarahs. The dimensions of the ark that we listed above are the gematria of the letters ׀ (300), ׁ (50), ׂ (30) and ׃ (1). According to the Zohar, the original name of the snake was the letter "chet." After the first sin, Adam added to letters "nun" and "shin" to its name, calling it "nachash". The accusing angel was initially known by the letters "samech-mem," but Adam changed its name to Sama'el<sup>2</sup>. This kept their powers under control. However, by the time of Noach's generation the effect of the name change had worn off and the world was filled with chamas (robbery)<sup>3</sup> which is spelled with the letters that make up the original names of the snake and the accusing angel (chet, samech and mem). In order to restore the balance of power to the world, Hashem had Noach build an ark with the precise measurements that would restore the names as Adam had decreed – The letters ׀ and ׁ changed the snake back into nachash and the letters ׂ and ׃ changed the name of the accusing angel back into Sama'el. The ark with those specific dimensions thus allowed Noach to overcome the “chamas” that was prevalent before the flood.

The Rambam provides us with a more rationalistic explanation. He explains that even though the ark was not big enough to carry everything that it needed to, Hashem wanted the ark to be very large so as to minimise the miracle. Hashem generally prefers to not perform overt miracles. (Of course, there have been some major exceptions over the course of history<sup>4</sup>). The reason for this is that Hashem wants us to retain free will. When Hashem conceals Himself behind the veil of nature, it appears that we are all operating only within nature, and we have the freedom to choose whether or not we serve Hashem. The same principle applies to the curse of Adam that we discussed last week – we are required to put in effort to earn our livelihood so that it *appears* that our effort gives rise to our salary. The more effort that we put in, the more it looks like our effort caused the outcome. In reality though, our livelihood is purely miraculous. Hashem just wants to reduce the appearance of the miracle by hiding, so to speak, behind our hard work.

My chavruta suggested another answer to our question. Hashem gave Noach such detailed measurements for the Ark precisely because Noach would be spending 120 years building it. Noach would be involved for many years in recognising and following Hashem's instructions. This would force Noach to recognise that the enormous structure that he apparently created independently was all based on Hashem's word and sourced from Him. After spending so many years building the ark, there was a risk that Noach might feel

<sup>1</sup> By Rabbi Yosef Yehuda Leib Sorotzkin. See <https://www.aish.com/tp/i/pp/132404143.html> for more details.

<sup>2</sup> Many are careful not to pronounce this name, indeed some say that it is prohibited to do so. One should rather say “samech mem”.

<sup>3</sup> Parashat Noach, Breishit 6:11.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Ramban teaches that these “open miracles” are to teach us to recognise the more “hidden miracles”.

some gaiva, some personal responsibility for saving humanity from the flood. To prevent such gaiva, Hashem reminded Noach that everything was really in His hands.

This message is also relevant to the curse of Adam and our role in earning parnassah. We do have to put in an effort, and at times we have to put in a very large and concerted effort. But all of our efforts will only be fruitful to the extent that Hashem wills it to be so. And it is important to realise that Hashem can bless our efforts in two different ways – by giving us more, or by allowing us to be satisfied with less.

The Chofetz Chaim explains this concept with a beautiful analogy. Imagine a barrel of wine that has one tap and thus allows only a limited flow. If one were to add more taps, the wine would flow out faster, but one would not be increasing the total amount of wine contained in the barrel. The same is true with our livelihood. A person may think that he can increase his income by working longer hours. In reality however, all he will “accomplish” by this is to reduce his spiritual merits. By increasing the time that he devotes to working, he will necessarily decrease the amount of time that he devotes to spiritual pursuits. He will have less time to study Torah, he will speed up his davening, or miss out on davening with a minyan. He may perceive an increase in wealth, but this is an illusion. It is not possible to earn more than Hashem has decreed. Hashem may see to it that any extra income is absorbed by expenses that he would not otherwise have incurred. Or, worst of all, any increase in income that he does keep will be at the expense of his portion in the World to Come!

This analogy speaks for itself. But let's try to develop this analogy a little further. The process of adding extra taps to our barrel of wine would require one to expend extra effort and expense to drill the new holes in the barrel and then buy and assemble the new taps. One would also need to purchase new vessels to store all of this 'extra' wine. Let's take the idea even further. If one collects a large number of these bottles full of wine, he may need extra space to store them all. He may need to extend his house, or perhaps even rent a warehouse and pay for transport! And some of the wine might spoil in the process! He has exerted a lot of extra effort but there would be no net gain in the amount of wine obtained overall. So such extra hishtadlut is not just superfluous, it may well be counterproductive!

The Chovot Halevavot<sup>5</sup> has a very simple but powerful description of the correct approach that one should have towards working for a living. He teaches that one should engage in whatever occupation Hashem has prepared for him, to the extent necessary for his sustenance and to acquire what he needs in this world. If Hashem has decreed more for him, it will come to him without trouble or effort, provided that he relies on Hashem and does not invest too much effort into natural means or rely on those means in his heart. If Hashem has decreed that he will only receive the bare minimum necessary for his sustenance then despite any and all extra effort, he would not succeed in any way.

The Chovot Halevavot concludes that if one just puts his faith in Hashem, he will achieve peace of mind and tranquillity of the soul, because his allotted portion cannot be transferred to anyone else, and it will not arrive earlier or later than the time that Hashem appointed.

Who doesn't want “peace of mind and tranquillity of the soul”?

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem gave Noach a big task that required a lot of effort over many years. But at the end of the day, Noach's success in surviving the flood and repopulating the world, was entirely from Hashem's kindness.
2. Remember that this same principle applies to our efforts to earn our livelihood.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> The Gate of Trust in G-d, Chapter 4 - פרק ד' - שער הביטחון.