

## 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?

### Noach – Our actions can make a difference

Welcome back to the eleventh year of Darchai Noam!

In this week's Parsha of Noach, we read about the flood and the miraculous Ark. However, soon after Noach and his family were miraculously saved, there occurred a tragic postscript. Noach planted a vineyard, made wine, and became drunk. While he was lying in a drunken stupor, Ham and his son Canaan<sup>1</sup> saw Noach's nakedness and took advantage of the opportunity to castrate Noach so that there would not be additional children to divide the inheritance.<sup>2</sup>

This act of Ham and Canaan against Noach had ramifications many generations later. After Yetziyat Mitzrayim, when Bnei Yisrael entered the land of Canaan, there were many miracles that were performed to assist them. One of those miracles was the 't'zirah', a type of hornet which Hashem sent to drive out the Canaanites (the descendants of Ham and Canaan)<sup>3</sup>. The Gemara<sup>4</sup> explains that the hornet stood on the banks of the Jordan and threw its venom at the inhabitants of the land, and it blinded their eyes from above and castrated them from below. Ham and Canaan sinned in two ways when Noach was drunk – by gazing at Noach's nakedness and by performing castration. Measure for measure, the Canaanites, Canaan's descendants, were punished with the same faculties that were used in the original sin.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, Shem and Yaphet, Noach's other two sons, honoured their father. When they found out what was happening, they covered him with a garment while being careful not to gaze at his nakedness. Rashi tells us that Shem, who took the initiative in this act, was rewarded in that his descendants were given the mitzvah of tzitzit (which relates to a garment). Yaphet assisted Shem but he took a secondary role, and thus he was given a lesser reward. Yaphet's descendants, who will be killed in the future war of Gog and Magog, will be given a dignified burial.<sup>6</sup> Thus their bodies would be covered, just like Yaphet helped to cover Noach's body. In contrast, the descendants of Ham, who left Noach uncovered, were ultimately led away by the king of Assyria naked and barefoot.<sup>7</sup>

In next week's Parasha of Lech Lecha, we will see another example of an act by an individual that has ramifications for future generations. After defeating the four kings, Avraham refused any reward from the king of Sodom. Avraham's reason was that people should not say that anyone other than Hashem had made him rich. Avraham said that he would not take so much as a “thread or shoe strap” as payment. The Gemara<sup>8</sup> teaches us that as a reward for this statement, Avraham's children merited two mitzvot: the thread of the tzitzit and the strap of the tefillin. And we see another example in the following Parasha of Vayera. When Avraham approaches Hashem to argue on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, he says: “I am but dust and ashes”. The Gemara<sup>9</sup> teaches us that as a reward for this statement, Avraham's descendants merited

<sup>1</sup> The Torah refers to “Ham, the father of Canaan”. The commentators explain that Ham and Canaan were both involved in this shameful incident. There are different opinions as to the exact role of Ham and Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> According to another opinion brought in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 70a), another horrific crime was committed against Noach, in addition to the castration.

<sup>3</sup> Sh'mot 23:28.

<sup>4</sup> Sotah 36a.

<sup>5</sup> I heard this comparison between the t'zirah and the sin against Noach in the name of the Chofetz Chaim, but I was unable to locate the source.

<sup>6</sup> See Yechezkel 39:11.

<sup>7</sup> Yeshayahu 20:4.

<sup>8</sup> Sotah 17a.

<sup>9</sup> Sotah 17a.

two mitzvot – the ashes of the parah aduma (which effects tahara for someone who became impure) and the dust of the sotah waters (which helps to restore marital harmony in cases where the wife was innocent).

We have seen a number of cases where an act of an individual had major ramifications for their descendants, whether for the good or for the bad, many generations later.

In Derech Hashem<sup>10</sup>, the Ramchal explains that the generations of Man are divided into 'roots' and 'branches'. Just like the roots of a tree have a profound impact on the branches of the tree, so too, people who live in the generations of the 'roots' have a powerful ability to influence the generations that follow. In the words of the Ramchal, "the branches always follow the root". The Ramchal writes that the era of the 'roots' began after the sin of Adam HaRishon and continued until the era of the dispersion, after the tower of Bavel (at the end of Parashat Noach). Thus, we can understand why the simple acts of individuals in these earlier generations can have such a profound impact on future generations.

We might assume that this is not relevant to us as we live in the later generations, and therefore our actions will surely not have such an influence on our descendants.

But that is actually not the case. Our actions can still have a significant impact on our children and grandchildren, as we see from the following episode. In the early twentieth century, many Jews escaped from Europe to a safer life in America. But they struggled financially. Working on Shabbat was compulsory, and many employees were told that if they fail to attend work on Saturday they would lose their jobs. Large numbers of Jews had enormous self-sacrifice to keep Shabbat under these difficult circumstances. Many of those families had children who were also shomrei Shabbat, but many others did not. Rav Moshe Feinstein was once asked why this was the case. He famously explained that whether their descendants kept Shabbat depended on the reactions of the parents. In some families, the parents who kept Shabbat with mesirat nefesh would complain how hard it is to be a Jew. Their children were more likely to drift from their Judaism. In other cases, the parents would come to the seudat Shabbat with joy. The message they would convey to their children gathered around the table was: "Yes things are hard, but Baruch Hashem at least we are Jewish. What a privilege it is to be Hashem's chosen People!"

Our actions and attitudes may not have the same impact on world history as the earlier generations did, but they still have a very real impact on our children and grandchildren and upon those on whom we have an influence. If we can maintain a positive attitude during challenging times, we will send a powerful message to those around us. The following words may help us to remain positive and appreciative of being Jewish in these very difficult times:<sup>11</sup>

*The Chofetz Chaim<sup>12</sup> teaches us that an intellectual understanding that Hashem controls the world is not sufficient. Rather, we must also internalise that understanding in our hearts, and infuse that feeling into every fibre of our being... This process of truly feeling and inculcating that Hashem runs the world is constantly under attack by the yetzer hara. One can rarely maintain such a level without daily efforts to remind oneself of this reality. We are challenged on this issue specifically, because the yetzer hara realises the significance of the rewards and benefits – **it creates a very strong bond between the individual and Hashem, and it also creates internal peace and calm, even if turmoil and strife are swirling all around.** It enables us to deal with significant issues calmly, and without anger, resentment or revenge seeking. **Understanding that what happens to us is part of a master plan designed by Hashem, who loves us more than any person and who is all-knowing and wants only what is good for us,** can give us strength, comfort and perspective while encountering life's challenges.*

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that our actions and attitudes have a profound impact on our children and on those upon whom we have an influence. What we do, and how we behave, affects others and matters.
2. Try to stay positive, engaged, and active. This could include learning more Torah, performing acts of kindness, reaching out to others that need help, volunteering, giving tzedakah or helping out your community. If we all come together in unity towards a common goal, that is the surest way to bring down Divine assistance during these challenging times.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>10</sup> Part II, Chapter 4, Sections 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Taken from "Divine Providence" by Ephraim Pinzower, Feldheim Publishers 2021, pp68-69, with some minor amendments.

<sup>12</sup> Shem Olam, Sha'ar Shmirat Shabbat.