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For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table
Parshas Noach
Dedicated in Loving Memory of Shmuel ben Yaakov Yitzchak z”l
Mr. Sidney Shlom • By his loving Children and Grandchildren

Say It Nicely

Hashem commanded Noach and his family to enter the ark. Along with them, seven of each type of tahlarah (pure) animal and two of each type of animal which is annemahh tahlarah (not pure) (Beresheet 7:8). The Gemora (Pesachim 3a) explains that the Torah could have used the word tamel (impure) and thereby used eight fewer letters. We all know that the Torah does not waste one word or even one single letter. Why, therefore, did the Torah use extra letters and words to describe these impure animals? To teach us the importance of speaking nicely, Rebbie Yehoshua Ben Levi says, “A person should never let a displeasing word pass his lips. Behold, the Torah added eight extra letters in order to avoid using a displeasing word.”

Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev zt”l explains how many aspects of Noach’s teishah were related to speech. The word teishah can mean ark, or it can mean word. Noach’s teishah was 300 amos (cubits) long, 50 amos wide and 30 amos high. Before a person speaks even one word (teishah), he should ponder the majesty of the Creator, which corresponds to the height of the ark (teishah). He should think about the breadth of his love and fear of the Creator, which corresponds to the width of the ark. And he should contemplate the tremendous pleasure that the Creator bestows upon the world, which corresponds to the length of the ark. Rav Levi Yitzchok is telling us that every word is very important, and should be carefully considered before it is spoken.

Powerful Influence

“...And Hashem saw the earth and beheld it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth” (Beresheet 6:12). Because of this terrible corruption, all living creatures, even animals had to die. Why were the animals punished? They had no free will to decide to do right or wrong. The Beis HaLevi relates that the sins of man were so powerful, that they even influenced the animals. Once the animals behavior changed, the atmosphere of immorality became so strong that it could not be changed. The only solution was to destroy the entire world. Thus, we see the power of the influence of sin. It can corrupt the whole world.

Kinderlach . . .

Chamas was the sin of Noach’s generation. It is the same sin as ‘charasmus’ (We took things against people’s will). Do you remember that from the viduy (confession) on Yom Kippur? We all felt so badly when we thought about those sins. Now is our chance to make sure we don’t repeat them. “Me first. I only got two candies and everyone else got three. I want more time on the swing even though there are many others waiting. I want a piece of cake even though others did not even have one piece yet.” These are all actions of taking. What would Noach do? “Please go ahead before me. Two pieces of candy are plenty for me. Please, take your turn on the swing: I’ve had enough time. Please make sure everyone else has received a piece of cake before you give me one.” Noach was a baal chessed (master of acts of kindness). Chessed saved him from destruction. Stealing, pushing, grabbing, and taking only lead to bad things. Chessed is the cure for those bad things.

Kindness Saved Them

The end of all flesh has come before Me because the earth is filled with chamas (robbery) (Beresheet 6:13). Rav Elyahu Dessler zt”l explains that the flood which destroyed the entire world was the verdict handed down by Hashem for the crime of chamas (robbery). Why did the Creator allow such a severe punishment for robbery? Theft is the result of the desire to take. People who are only interested in themselves, thereby taking what does not belong to them will destroy themselves and their entire society. What is the antidote? Giving. We find Noach and his family, who survived the flood, were totally occupied with giving during the entire year that they were enclosed within the ark.

The Gemora (Sanhedrin 108b) relates a conversation between Shem, the son of Noach and Eliezer the servant of Abraham about life in the ark. “How did you manage to care for all of those animals in the ark?” asked Eliezer. “It was very difficult,” Shem replied. “We had to feed each animal at its eating time — day and night. We had to figure out what food each animal ate. One time my father was late feeding the lion, and he let out such a roar that all of the animals in the ark were terrified. My father went to him and the lion bit him, crippling him for life. None of us slept a wink the entire year. We were too busy caring for all of the animals, giving each one its individual food at the proper time.”

Kinderlach . . .

Before you speak, think about what you are about to say. Is there a nicer way to say it? Instead of saying, “You are wrong.” Try saying, “Perhaps there is another way to look at it. Let’s examine the facts together and see if this is really so.” Instead of saying “Ow! You hurt me.” Try saying “I’m sure you didn’t realize but you jumped into me.” Instead of saying “You’re always oversleeping.” Try saying “It’s time to get up. Can I help you with something?” Sweet words are like sugar on the lips and soothing to the soul. Speak nicely. People will always be anxious to hear what you have to say.

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