

אושר החיים

לע"נ ר' חיים יוסף ליב בן ר' שאול יצחק ז"ל

Praising Hashem: The Foundation of Mankind

The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabah 34:1)* relates, that when *Noach* disembarked from the *Teivah*, he used this as an opportunity to immediately praise Hashem. Since, for twelve months he was locked up in the *Teivah* in which he was spared from the waters of the *Mabul*, and was now suddenly given freedom once again! Additionally, *Noach* spent time contemplating why Hashem had told him to bring so many of each pure animal on the *teivah*. He concluded, that Hashem wanted him to bring a *korban Todah*; of gratitude to Hashem, at the first possible chance to do so (*Bereishis Rabah 34:9*; also see *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 23* and *Radal* quoting the *Rikanti*).¹

Thus, we see that the *very first* conducts that took place as soon as *Noach* stepped upon the soil of earth, were acts of praising Hashem! We may explain that these specific acts were not merely by chance. The *Maharal* (see *Be'er Hagolah 3:2*, and *Gevuros Hashem 57*) has a rule that the beginning of an endeavor, is the essential meaning of that effort. Therefore, the *Torah* could be teaching us that this would be the very foundation of mankind. Inasmuch as the creation of the world was founded upon the idea of Hashem bringing *chesed* to all of Creation – "*Olam Chesed Yiboneh*" (*Tehillim 89*)², the new beginning of mankind after the *Mabul* would be built upon *hoda'ah* to Hashem for all the kindness which He bestows upon us!

We may learn from here, how important of a role *hoda'ah* to Hashem plays in our lives! In the first *brocha* of *Shemone Esrei*, we praise Hashem as a "*Gomeil Chassodim Tovim*." One may wonder as to the seemingly extra wording here. Would it not be enough to refer to Hashem as a "*Gomeil Chassodim*"? Would we not understand on our own that all the kindness of Hashem is "good"? What then, is meant by the word "*tovim*"?!

Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l often used to say, "Do you want to know what is the meaning of good? The *posuk* tells us openly – "*Tov lehodos laHashem*" – "Good" means to praise Hashem!

With this in mind, we may explain that when we mention that Hashem is a "*Gomeil Chassodim Tovim*", we are actually stating two points. One is, that Hashem continuously showers many thousands of kindnesses down upon us at all times. This in its own right, is great enough. Yet, there is a second point as well. That is, all these *chassodim* are "*tovim*"; they are new opportunities through which we may praise Hashem!

Rav Miller (Lev Avigdor, Sha'ar Habechina 13) tells us the way in which to incorporate this into our lives in a way that will change us. He says, that when we praise Hashem in a general way, it is meaningless. However, when we take specific, individual examples of kindness, and contemplate the goodness that Hashem has bestowed upon us, that will surely make an impression upon us over time. When taking a walk, think about the slight breeze that blows against you! Learn to enjoy it! How about the fact that you have a place to sleep every night? I once worked in a *seforim* store, in which I would close up the store every night. As I locked up and would leave through the back alley, I would see all the homeless sleeping on the grass. Imagine, you lived for so many years without even once having to worry about a roof over your head! Thus, we see that our primary purpose in this world is to sing praises to Hashem over everything!

¹ One may also see this idea in the *Chizkuni*. See further in the *Radal* who explains why the *posuk* refers to this *Todah* as a *Korbon Olah* – which is not usually used for such *korbonos*.

² See *Ohr Hatzafun* in which the *Alter of Slabodka* elaborates upon this point in many places – for example in *cheilek 1, Midas Hachessed*.

פרשת נח
תשפ"ה

The new beginning of mankind after the *Mabul* would be built upon *hoda'ah* to Hashem for all the kindness which He bestows upon us!

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Finding Contrast in Our Lives

When *Noach* was commanded to build the *teivah*, Hashem told him to make a '*tzohar*'. While one opinion said, this meant that he should make a window, others understood this to mean, that they should place a special quality stone, which would give off a radiance of light in the *teivah* (*Rashi, Bereshis 6:16*).

While the purpose of the *tzohar* was to illuminate the *teivah*, we may explain another purpose that Hashem may have intended for *Noach* and his family, as well.

Noach was about to experience a special *hashgocha pratis* throughout his stay in the *teiva*. Yet, Hashem foresaw that it would nevertheless, also be a time of great discomfort and difficulty for *Noach* and all those with him. While in the *teiva*, *Noach* felt an unusual amount of pressure while taking care of all the animals, as we see how he actually regularly coughed up blood as a result of this great obligation (*Rashi 7:23*). Between everything, the time that *Noach* had spent in the *teivah*, seemed to be days of great difficulty. How was he expected to keep growing in *ruchnius* under such conditions? We may explain this as following.

Every morning, we begin the *birchos hashachar* with the *brocha* of, "אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְשִׁכְוֵי בֵּינָה לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה". Following this *brocha*, are three other ones of which the praise begins with the words, "שְׁלֵא עָשְׂנִי...". Why do we begin this set of *brachos* in this way?

Perhaps this may be explained according to a principle set forth by *Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l*. Our chief function in this world is to call out in praise to Hashem over all the kindness that He continuously showers down upon us. Yet, how many of us, regularly get caught up in unproductive - or even - negative thoughts, while we constantly focus upon the many challenges which life puts before us? After a while, it becomes very difficult to change direction and take note of the many, many *chassodim* that surround us throughout the day. What, then, could we do to ensure that our main obligation of sincerely praising Hashem does not go lost?!

The answer to this, is to look around oneself, and begin to take note of the many other people who cross his path throughout the day. Does he have a physical ailment – such as a sharp pain in his foot as he walks down the street? Let him then take note of the war veteran in a wheelchair on the street corner, that he just passed. Without any legs, this man can only maneuver himself around on wheels alone...If that's the case, then what a *brocha* it is to walk around with nothing more than a pain in his foot! The point is, that every person can find happiness in the *chassodim* with which Hashem provides him, by contrasting his own life to those who are not as fortunate as himself.

Therefore, perhaps this can be another reason of why *Chazal* begin our day with a *brocha* of thanking Hashem for the rooster, who could tell the difference between day and night. If this is the case with a simple creature, then surely, we are given the ability to recognize the difference between the 'day' and 'night' that is present in our lives. This means to say, that we are able to see the abundance of good around us, when contrasting ourselves to others. With this in mind, we then continue with the three *brochos* of 'contrast' – "שְׁלֵא עָשְׂנִי...".

We may now, possibly be able to explain another meaning of the '*tzohar*'. Hashem knew that as great as *Noach* truly was, the vicissitudes in the *teiva*, while being there for such an extended time, would be very difficult. Thus, according to one opinion, Hashem had told *Noach*, to bring a unique way of brightening up the *teiva* through the novelty of this jewel. This would allow them to stay focused on positive thoughts and continue to see the many *chassodim* that were all around them.

However, the other opinion felt, that it was not necessary for Hashem to provide a *tzaddik* such as *Noach* with an external 'novelty' to keep him in a state of joy. Rather, all he needed was a means of being able to see the world outside his window at all times. This itself, would be a constant reminder to *Noach* that, while he certainly felt for the sorrow of the outside world¹ – at the same time, he was overwhelmed with gratitude to Hashem for the great *chessed* that was done for him in the *teiva*.

¹ While the world would be suffering, *Noach* would surely not sit quietly. As *Chazal* tell us (*Taanis 11a*), one should feel the anguish of the entire community. Thus, *Noach* and all those present in the *teiva*, found ways to join together with the world's sorrow (see *Rashi 7:7*).

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