

CONSTANT TAKING IS SELF DESTRUCTING

by Rabbi Dovid Green

We all relate to the misery we feel when we suffer from a cold. The constant runny nose, sneezing, and fatigue tend to demand our attention and remind us how really uncomfortable we feel. It has the ability and the tendency to affect our whole attitude. Imagine receiving a phone call on one of those miserable days with the news that you won a major lottery, and you will have no financial worries for the rest of your life. I believe that even under those unpleasant circumstances most of us would manage to be full of cheer.

The question then is, why aren't we constantly ecstatic with our lives? We all possess things which we would never sell for even the worth of the highest lottery, so why don't we celebrate? I'm referring to the wonderful gifts we receive every day. We wake up, we can see, we have mobility, we can breath, digest, pass waste, and literally thousands of functions which we take completely for granted without a thought. Aren't these functions more vital to us than any sum of wealth? We know they are, because we have all seen what it's like when some of these functions don't work correctly. Yet we still often find reason to be disillusioned despite that fact that we win the lottery in the biggest way each time we awake, and each time we draw a breath.

Generally this comes from self-centeredness. The passage states as follows. "For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). One interpretation explains that the word "from" in the passage explains why the inclination of man's heart is evil. Man's inclination is evil because of his youth. In other words, he refuses to grow up. Children are born self-centered. It is normal and necessary. However, as we get older we are expected to become other-centered. Marriage and children facilitate that process. If we refuse to grow up, the old selfish habits remain strong and we remain "takers" instead of "givers".

This was the problem before the time of the Great Deluge in the days of Noach. "And G-d said to Noach, the end of all flesh has come before Me, for the world is filled with corruption (Genesis 6:13)." Rashi explains that this refers to robbery. Everyone was taking. Everyone felt that it was all coming to him. The entire world was unfortunately a world of "takers." This went directly against the purpose for which the world was created. "The end of the world has _come_ before me. It was not G-d's retribution, but it was a natural consequence of the deeds which that generation embraced. It came, as it were, on its own.

G-d tells Noach to build an ark. It should be populated with every form of life which existed on earth. All of their foods were stored aboard the ark. Who had the job of feeding such a huge population of

creatures? Noach and his family did. Day and night Noach, his wife, his sons, and their wives, fed animals. This went on for over a year. Why? Why couldn't G-d use an alternative plan? Why was the survival of life made dependant on Noach and his family working non-stop, day and night?

Rabbi Dessler explains that this was necessary for the survival of all life. As we stated earlier, the basis of the sin of this generation was selfishness. The only circumstances which could save the world was one in which humankind in microcosm would exercise complete selflessness. These were the circumstances which Noach and his family were placed in - such that only their most basic needs could be addressed, and the animals' needs would dominate. This was the wisdom behind the "mini-world" that was created in the ark. This was the true fulfillment of the purpose of the creation of the world, and it was the foundation upon which the new post-deluge world would be built.

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