

SEND THE GUINEA PIG!

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

"RavFrand" - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Noach

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Y. Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #69, Ma'ariv & Mitzvos in the Land of the Midnight Sun. Good Shabbos!

The Raven Tells Noach, "Send The Guinea Pig on This Mission"

The pasuk [verse] [Bereishis 8:7] tells us that Noach sent out a raven to check whether land could already be seen. The Medrash says that the raven complained to Noach that, of all the animals and creatures in the ark, he was singled out for this mission. The Medrash continues that Noach answered him back, "What does the world need you for? You are not edible nor are you fit to be offered as a sacrifice." [The commentaries on the Medrash point out that although there were other non-kosher birds on the ark, the raven was the least appetizing of all such birds.]

G-d, however, told Noach that he should not have been so harsh with the raven, for there would come a time that the world would need the raven. There would come a time when a Tzadik would arise who would make the whole world dry (referring to the decree of Eliyahu in the time of King Achav that there would be a drought) and this Tzadik would need the ravens to bring him food [Kings I 17:6].

By keeping Eliyahu alive, the ravens ultimately kept the world alive, because the world needed Eliyahu to remove his curse. Hence, the ravens would literally be responsible for sustaining all of mankind.

We have to understand a number of things. First of all, why did G-d in fact use the ravens to sustain Eliyahu?

I saw an interesting interpretation from the Menachem Tzion. The Menachem Tzion quotes the

Talmud in Pesachim [113b] that there are three who love one another, one of whom is the raven. Thus, ravens do have a redeeming social value: Other animals, as well as human beings, do not get along. They fight and argue. Ravens, however, love one another.

This is why G-d picked the ravens to feed Eliyahu. Eliyahu felt that the generation of Achav was worthless. They were idol worshippers. He saw no purpose in their existence. Yet, the Gemara says [Jerusalem Talmud Peah 1:1] that in the generation of Dovid, when even children were well versed in the laws of purity and impurity, at times when they went out to war there were casualties -- because there were slanderers among them; however in the generation of Achav, even though they were all idolaters, they were victorious in their battles because there was unity and love of Israel among them.

This is the lesson that G-d wanted to hint to Eliyahu: These ravens will feed you. These birds, who you think, and who Noach thought, have no redeeming quality -- they in fact have a tremendous quality. They love one another. This is a quality which is redemptive for the ravens and redemptive for the generation of Achav as well.

The generation of Achav should not be thought of as worthless. Although no one should ever minimize the sin of idolatry, the generation of Achav did have outstanding merit by virtue of the fact that they practiced Love of Israel (Ahavas Yisroel). Through the z'chus [merit] of this Ahavas Yisroel, when they went to war, they were always victorious.

There is a second message that G-d was sending to Eliyahu. The ravens brought the meat to Eliyahu -- according to the Gemara in Chulin [5a] -- from the kitchen of Achav. "This Achav that you, Eliyahu, think is worthless, is, in a certain sense, sustaining you."

Thus, G-d is again teaching Eliyahu not to discount Achav and his generation. No human being can be discounted. Every creature has its purpose and has to be treated as such. Nothing in creation is without purpose. Even a raven and even an Achav have their purpose.

Moshe and Noach as Two Ship Captains in Stormy Seas

There is an interesting Medrash at the end of Devorim. Moshe Rabbeinu has a dialog with various personalities in Tanach. Noach boasts to Moshe that he is greater than Moshe, because he was saved from the generation of the Flood. To which Moshe responds, "No, you saved yourself, but were not able to save your generation; I, however, saved myself and saved my generation. When did I save my generation? When G-d said 'Desist from me and I will destroy them,' [Devorim 9:14] I pleaded with G-d and was successful in saving both myself and my generation. Therefore, I am greater than you."

The Medrash compares this to two ships that were lost at sea. In one case, the captain saved himself

and let the boat sink. In the other case, the captain saved himself and saved the boat and passengers. The Medrash comments that, obviously, the latter captain deserves the greater praise. Therefore, the Medrash says, Moshe Rabbeinu was greater than Noach.

We've mentioned in past years, that even though Noach tried to have an effect on his generation, for whatever reason, he was not successful in saving the generation. The Zohar points out this is why the flood is referred to as "the waters of Noach" [Isaiah 54:9], because Noach was to blame for not being able to save his generation.

I once read a eulogy that Rav Shmuel Rozovsky said on the Ponnevitzer Rav. The Ponnevitzer Rav was a tireless worker and labored for Torah causes throughout the world. He built the Ponnevitz Yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel, that is not only a Yeshiva but is an entire city. He spread Torah throughout the world. He was indefatigable. He could not be stopped. Even when he was already an older man, when other people of a much younger age would fall from exhaustion, the Ponnevitzer Rav would continue on his mission.

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky addressed the question, "What motivated the Ponnevitzer Rav? -- What kept him going?" Rav Rozovsky said that he heard many times from the Ponnevitzer Rav that he was haunted by the fact that he himself was saved from the Holocaust of Europe but he wasn't successful in saving his generation. From the Lithuanian Rabbinate, the Ponnevitzer Rav was one of the very few that made it out of Europe alive, but he was constantly plagued by the fact that he had not been able to save his generation.

The Ponnevitzer Rav would accuse himself of the Medrash's accusation of Noach, "Myself I have saved, but my boat I did not save." Instead of sinking into depression, however, this thought motivated him. He became 'obsessed' with the idea that, "If I couldn't save that generation in Europe, there is a new generation that I can save." When I go to the Heavenly Yeshiva, I want to be able to say "I saved myself and I saved my generation."

We live, Baruch Hashem, in a time where we have the freedom and the ability and the opportunity to do mitzvos without limit. But, we also live in an era of a Holocaust. If not an era of a Holocaust of gas chambers, Rachmana l'tzlan, one in which Jews are being lost spiritually. I am afraid that one day we will also have to answer to an accusation that "We have saved ourselves, but we have lost our ship." We, with all our mitzvos, and our charity, and our learning Torah -- all very fine -- have, thank G-d, been able to withstand the "tests of America." But that is not enough.

There is always an accusation of "You have saved yourself, but not your generation." Therefore, whatever our walk of life, whether its in teaching, or in community service, or whether it's in business or medicine or law or accounting or anything, there is always the challenge to not merely look after our own spiritual needs, but also those of our generation.

If we do not have the holy soul possessed by the Ponnevitzer Rav, and we live normal lives and are not 'obsessed' with this idea, as he was, at least we have to be motivated into some kind of action so

that in the future, we will also be able to say "We saved ourselves, and we also saved our generation."

Sources and Personalities

Rav Yosef Kahaneman (1886-1969), Ponnevitzer Rav, and founder of the Ponnevitz Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, Israel.

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky (1913-1979) one of the Roshei Yeshiva at the Ponnevitz Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, Israel.

Glossary

Tzadik -- righteous individual

Tana"ch -- Bible (acronym for Torah - Neviim - Kesuvim, the three section of the Bible -- Five Books of Moses, Prophets, and Writings)

Rachmana l'tzlan -- may the All Merciful spare us

Baruch Hashem -- Blessed be G-d

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