

LESSON OF THE RAVENS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Noach

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 345, Milah For Non-Jew: Is it permitted?
Good Shabbos!*

Eliyahu Was Taught A Lesson By The Ravens

The rains finally stopped and the waters began to recede. Noach wanted to assess the situation so he sent out the raven to seek out dry land. The Medrash states that the reason why Noach chose the raven was because the raven seemed to be a species of minimal value: "What does the world need you for? You are not fit either for eating or for a sacrificial offering."

In fact, the Medrash indicates that Noach was angry at the raven and sending him on this mission was somewhat of a "punishment". The raven was the only occupant of the Teyva [Ark] to mate during the flood. Both humans and animals were warned not to have relations with their mates during the time in the Teyva. The raven violated this prohibition. In fact, the raven's mate was now pregnant, so Noach felt that he would not be violating his mandate of saving all species by risking the life of the 'father' raven at this juncture.

However, the Medrash says that G-d told Noach to accept the raven back into the Teyva because in the future the world would need his services. There would come a time when a righteous person would make the land dry (Eliyahu the prophet). There would be a tremendous famine in the land and the ravens would bring him food and meat (from the house of Ahab, King of Israel).

There is a fascinating Baal HaTurim that reads an allusion to this Medrash into a pasuk in our Parsha [8:7] "And he sent out the raven and it went back and forth until the water dried up [ad yevoshes

hamayim] from upon the land". The Baal HaTurim points out that the word yevoshes [dried up] has the same letters as the word 'Tishbi' which refers to Eliyahu who was known as the 'Tishbi'. This allusion hints at G-d's admonition to Noach not to be so hard on the raven, since the raven will be needed when there is a drought in the time of Eliyahu the Tishbi.

However, the question needs to be asked -- why did G-d chose the ravens from among all other birds or creatures to sustain Eliyahu? If, in fact, ravens have a reputation of being cruel creatures, and if, in fact, the raven was the only creature to violate the rule of no relations during the time in the Teyva, why were the ravens specifically chosen to be the 'angels of mercy' for Eliyahu?

The Succas Dovid answers that G-d was trying to teach a lesson to Eliyahu by specifically using this 'delivery service'. The lesson was that good things can even come out of ravens, and so too good things may even emerge out of wicked people. Eliyahu the prophet was the penultimate zealot (kanai). He railed against the Jewish people and declared them to be worthless "for they have nullified Thy Covenant" [Melachim I 19:10]. Eliyahu said that they were beyond redemption and they should all die. G-d is hinting to Eliyahu that it is not true. They are not that bad. Even from the wicked amongst them, good things happen.

We know that at every Bris (Circumcision) there is an area set aside as the "Chair of Eliyahu". Eliyahu is, as it were, the honored guest who appears at every Bris Milah. The Shalo"h sees this symbolism as a form of "punishment" for Eliyahu. Since he uttered the words "they have abandoned Thy Covenant (azvu Bris-cha), he is summoned to appear at every Bris in the future to witness the fact that he was wrong -- that Jews are still keeping the Covenant! His stinging and ringing indictment that the Jews nullified the Covenant was uncalled for!

This was the message of the ravens delivering Eliyahu his food. No wicked individual is beyond hope. He can always come back and prove himself a worthwhile member of society -- even the raven! This especially applies to the Jewish people. They may have done terrible things, they may have worshipped idolatry in the time of Ahab, but do not write them off.

Where Does It Say I Must Arrive On Time?

Upon emerging from the Teyva after the flood, Noach planted a vineyard. The Torah uses the words "VaYachel Noach" [9:20], which is commonly translated as "Noach began". However, Rashi comments that the word VaYachel alludes to the fact that Noach debased himself -- he made himself profane (chullin) -- by planting the vineyard immediately upon leaving the Teyva. This very same Noach, who at the beginning of the parsha is described as righteous and perfect (Tzadik, Tamim), experienced a spiritual descent and is described as "a man of the earth". Wine should not have been the first crop that he planted. It marked an inauspicious beginning to life back on dry land.

The Seforno explains that there was no crime in planting a vineyard; it just was not the most appropriate thing for a person such as Noach to do. The descent, from the spiritual heights of a "Tzadik, Tamim", to the mundane level of a common man, often starts just this way. It does not begin

with a dramatic action that throws away every value he has ever stood for. It begins with an act which is merely not esthetically appealing ('nisht shein' in Yiddish) for a person of his caliber.

Rav Henoch Leibowitz references a famous comment of the Maggid Mishneh. The Maggid Mishneh comments that the mitzvah "You shall do that which is right and proper (haYashar v'haTov)" [Devorim 6:18] is a mandate to act 'properly'.

Sometimes, when a person is told that the Torah requires him to act in a certain fashion, his response is "Where does it say so?" Where does the Torah say that one is not allowed to do such and such? Where is it recorded in Shulchan Aruch that this is forbidden? The answer to that question is this very pasuk [verse]: "You shall do that which is right and proper". The Maggid Mishneh explains that the Torah can not explain the details, says. The definition of what is correct and proper can change. The Torah was given for all times and all places. The details of "haYashar v'HaTov" can change from time to time and from place to place. There is no one finite way of being a 'mensch' (a person who behaves morally and ethically), but the obligation to be a 'mensch' is constant. It is a positive Biblical command.

Planting a vineyard at this particular point in history was not specifically a crime, but it was certainly not the right and proper activity for Noach to begin with immediately upon descending from the Teyva.

A dental hygienist recently told me: "I have many religious patients. They make appointments and then they just stroll in here whenever they want. Fifteen minutes late, twenty minutes late. I only allot a half-hour per patient. If a patient comes in twenty minutes late, it ruins the entire day's schedule and I suffer for it the whole day."

Where does it state in Shulchan Aruch that one must be on time to his appointment with the dental hygienist? It is not mentioned in Shulchan Aruch. Why is it not mentioned in Shulchan Aruch? It is not mentioned because it is an explicit Biblical command! There are many things not mentioned in Shulchan Aruch because they are explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The mitzvah is "You shall do that which is right and proper". The mitzvah is colloquially called "Be a mensch!" A mensch does not come 20 minutes late to an appointment, without apologizing, as if nothing happened!

This is the meaning of the Maggid Mishneh's comment. People did not go to dental hygienists in the time of the Maggid Mishneh. Therefore the Torah could not say and the Shulchan Aruch could not legislate that there is a positive command to appear promptly for your appointment with the dental hygienist. The details of the mitzvah change. But one thing does not change -- one needs to be a mensch! This is constant.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Noach are provided below:

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