

# FREE GIFTS FOR PEOPLE WHO FIND FAVOR

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 521, The Ben Noach & the Nectarine. Good Shabbos!

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## Free Gifts for People Who Find Favor

I would like to begin with an interesting observation from the end of last week's parsha, Parshas Bereishis. The pasuk says, "And Hashem reconsidered having made Man on earth, and He had heartfelt sadness. And Hashem said, 'I will blot out Man whom I created from the face of the ground - from man to animal to creeping things, and to birds of the sky; for I have reconsidered My having made them.'" [Bereishis 6:6-7]

Man had deteriorated to the extent that G-d, as it were, regretted having made them and He therefore decided to wipe out the world -- the subject of this week's parsha. Parshas Bereishis ends with the words "And Noach found chen [favor] in the eyes of Hashem." [Bereishis 6:8]

The Or HaChaim writes that Noach's "finding of favor" was not because of his deeds. The fact that he was a Tzadik would not have saved him by itself. G-d had full regret over the entire creation of the world. When G-d decides to destroy, He destroys the righteous along with the wicked. Noach was saved because of the attribute of 'chen' that Noach found in G-d's Eyes. The Or HaChaim interprets the word 'chen' as coming from the word 'chinam' [free]. This was a gift, so to speak, from G-d to Noach - a "Get out of Destruction FREE Card".

The Or HaChaim points out that there are certain mitzvos whose function is to bring 'chen' upon man. Such mitzvos endear us to G-d. Of course, all mitzvos are important, but certain mitzvos have this special endearing quality. When a person performs such mitzvos, the Almighty grants him that which he may not deserve, simply because he has "pressed the right button", so to speak.

L'Havdil, sometimes certain of our children misbehave. We might be angry with them, but they know how to press our right buttons. They somehow manage to do the right thing to "make it up". Therefore, we look the other way and don't mete out the punishment the child really deserves.

Sometimes we notice that certain people are very successful. We ask ourselves how that person merits such Divine beneficence. It does not seem to make sense. We know full well that there are

greater Tzadikim out there who are not as successful. Sometimes the answer is that the person has found favor in the Eyes of Hashem. He may be performing those one or two mitzvos that have this magical power of inspiring "Free Gifts" (Matnas Chinom) from the Master of the World.

Of course, we would all like to know, which these two or three mitzvos are. The Or HaChaim states that G-d has never revealed which these "special mitzvos" are. The reason is obvious. If the identity of these mitzvos were known, everyone would rush to do (just) these mitzvos! However, Noach -- wittingly or unwittingly -- did observe these mitzvos, and that was the "power" by which he merited salvation for himself and his family.

Noach did something that ingratiated himself to the Almighty. In spite of the fact that the Almighty was in a "mood" to wipe out the entire planet, Noach found favor in His Eyes. The Or HaChaim points out that the letters of Noach's name (reversed) even spell the word 'chen' [favor].

Unfortunately, we do not know which these two or three mitzvos are that grant us special favor. But if we perform all the mitzvos, we can obviously be guaranteed that we are including this select category of mitzvos as well!

### **One Cannot Sell That Which He Does Not Own**

Noach was commanded: "Make for yourself an Ark of gopher wood; make the Ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch." [Bereishis 6:14]. Rashi comments: "G-d has many ways to bring about salvation. Why then did G-d trouble Noach with the tedious and complicated building of the Ark?"

We can imagine many other "easier" ways in which G-d could have saved Noach. Certainly the Almighty Himself could have figured out a simpler rescue scenario than the multi-year task of building a huge floating vessel.

The Ramba"n points out that despite the use of a floating vessel, the rescue was still miraculous. Neither the huge dimensions of the multi-story Ark, nor even the largest air-craft carrier in the world could hold two of every animal that exists in the world (and food to feed them). After all the sweat and toil, it was still a miraculous salvation. So what was the point of going through all the effort in the first place? Why wasn't the miracle performed with a small raft or something even smaller? The Ramba"n explains that it HaShem's way is to "minimize the super-natural", so that when we read of miraculous occurrences, they may sound -- at first blush -- naturally plausible. G-d does not wish for the miracle to appear as glaring as it really is.

Rashi explains that the reason why the Almighty required Noach to engage in construction of an Ark for 120 years prior to the flood was so that the people of the generation would see, and be given warning that their doom was imminent. This was an opportunity to warn the masses to repent. Noach had 120 years to try to influence his neighbors to mend their ways so that the Ark would not be necessary.

Noach's efforts in this regard were totally fruitless. Other than his immediate family, no one took heed of his warnings.

Let us consider: Noach was the first outreach professional in the history of the world. That was his job. He knew the truth. He knew what G-d wanted. The entire world was going down the wrong path, and he worked for 120 years to try to convince people of the error of their ways.

Now consider a modern day Kiruv organization. Like any organization, they have lay leadership and they have a Board of Directors. They raise money. They have a payroll. They need to pay for overhead, phone bills, fax machines, office space, and the whole works. Now imagine after 5 years, at a Board of Directors meeting, the Chairman of the Board asks the paid Kiruv worker, "Nu, over these past 5 years, how many people have you influenced to become religious? How many people started keeping kosher?"

The employee responds, "None!"

The lay leaders are incredulous. "After five years, with a budget of \$100,000 per year, you have nothing to show for it? Okay. We'll give you 5 more years..."

After five more years and another \$500,000 (and perhaps more, with salary increases), they ask the same question at another meeting. Again the answer is, no one has been influenced to become more religious from all their outreach efforts.

Noach would not have lasted. He was an abysmal failure. He didn't help even one person turn towards G-d in 120 years!

All facetiousness aside, what is the meaning of all this? Noach was Tamim [pure]. He was a Tzadik [righteous]. He was a wonderful person. The nature of the world is that such people do have an influence and impact. Why was Noach so unsuccessful in his mission?

I saw an interesting observation from Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky. We learn: "Noach, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, went into the Ark because of the waters of the Flood" [Bereishis 7:6]. Rashi comments on the words "because of the waters of the Flood" that Noach was a man of little faith. He believed but did not fully believe that the Flood would ever come. He therefore did not enter the Ark until the waters actually forced him in.

[This Rashi is not to be taken at face value. Noach was a great believer -- certainly a far greater believer than most of us -- and it does not behoove us to glibly quote the literal interpretation of Rashi's word's that Noach was a man of little faith.]

According to Noach's spiritual level, he demonstrated some small aspect of lack of faith. At some level, he did not believe it was going to happen. Even after it started raining, he hesitated entering the Ark. Perhaps even as the water level rose, Noach maintained: "this is just a passing shower". Finally, when the water reached his ankles he told his family, "I think it's time to go into the boat."

Perhaps his doubt was out of noble reasons. Perhaps he believed that G-d's compassion would not allow Him to destroy the world. Perhaps he believed that the people would eventually repent. For whatever reason, in his heart of hearts, there was something lacking in Noach's belief. He simply was not completely convinced that it would actually happen.

This explains why, during 120 years, Noach was not able to influence anyone. The only way a person can be successful in outreach is to be totally convinced in the "product" that he is "selling". A person must believe to his core that Torah is the Truth, if he is to help others see the benefits of a Torah life style. Someone who has his own doubts will not be able to have an effect on other people. One cannot sell that which he does not own.

Someone who wants to "sell" Emunah [belief], Yiddishkeit [Judaism], Torah -- in fact, someone who wants to sell anything -- must fully believe in his product. Those who are successful in Kiruv are successful to a large extent because of how impressed people are with the outreach worker's dedication, self-sacrifice, and personal conviction.

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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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