

DID THE ANIMALS COME OR DID NOACH HAVE TO BRING THEM?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Noach

Did The Animals Come Or Did Noach Have To Bring Them?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 784, Spreading Bad News. Good Shabbos!

G-d told Noach "And from every clean animal take unto you (tikach lach)..." [Bereshis 7:2]. Just a few pasukim later we read: "Two by two they came to Noach (ba-u el Noach) into the Teyva..." [Bereshis 7:9]. There seems to be a discrepancy here. One pasuk indicates that Noach is supposed to bring the animals into the Teyva, the other pasuk indicates they came on their own. The Ramban, in his commentary on Chumash, raises this question. The Ramban asks, "How did it really happen? Did the animals come or did Noach have to go round them up?" The Ramban raises this question in two places and gives two different answers. However in Chapter 6 Verse 20, the Ramban says that the non-Kosher animals came on their own, but Noach had to round up the Kosher animals.

The Ramban explains that the non-Kosher animal's purpose in coming to the Teyva was entirely a matter of self-preservation. They came (two of each kind) in order that they would be able to perpetuate their species in the post Flood world. However, the Kosher animals (of which 7 pairs were to be taken aboard the Teyva) were brought aboard so that they (at least some of them) could be offered as sacrifices upon an altar following the exit from the Teyva. Here, G-d did not give them the instinctual drive to gravitate toward the Teyva and hence, toward their ultimate slaughter. In the case of the Kosher animals, Noach had to round them up and coax them to come aboard.

G-d places certain instincts for self-preservation within various species. Why do salmon, who have been in the Pacific Ocean for 3 years, suddenly decide to make it all the way back to some little river in Alaska to spawn and die there? Why do beavers build dams? The Almighty put -- through nature -- instincts into animals that are necessary for their survival. They do not go to school. They know these things instinctively, because that is the way the Holy One Blessed be He created the world.

The Ramban explains that for the same reason, all the non-Kosher animals, one day, instinctively,

showed up at the door of the Teyva. G-d placed the instinct within them to make them gravitate to that location. But, says the Ramban, G-d only places within an animal an instinct that is good for that animal. G-d does not put within animals an instinct to show up at the entrance of the Teyva so that in 13-15 months they should be slaughtered. That would not be fair. That would not be "yashar".

G-d is teaching us a lesson. We must be careful to do things that are right, that are "yashar". This is the way G-d made His Creation and this is the way He wants man to act. This is one of the recurring themes of the Book of Bereshis. The Talmud [Avodah Zarah] calls the book of Bereshis, Sefer HaYashar [The Book of the Just], based on the fact that its main heroes are Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov who are called "yesharim" [righteous individuals].

In his introduction to his commentary on the book of Bereshis, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehdah Berlin (The Netziv) writes that G-d is Just and He does not tolerate "righteous people who are not themselves just". This is one of the great praiseworthy traits of the patriarchs. Besides the fact that they were righteous and pious and lovers of G-d, they were also "yashar" [straight; just] individuals. The Yiddish word which describes what they were is "mentchen".

The Netziv elaborates that as a result of their characteristic trait of being "yashar," they were respected and even beloved by the Gentiles amongst whom they lived and with whom they interacted. The Gentiles were not impressed by them eating only "yashan" or wearing "Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin" or by how much they paid for their esrogim or by any other type of meticulous piety the Avos may have practiced. Rather, the Gentiles recognized honesty and integrity when they saw it. This is what the Avos practiced. This is what brought them respect and admiration from the Nations. This is why they were called Yesharim [straight individuals]. This is how they influenced the whole world of their day.

At every opportunity throughout the Book of Bereshis, the Almighty teaches us importance of being "Yashar". Included in this modeling of "straightness" is G-d's refusal to put an instinct into an animal which would cause them to march towards their own future slaughter.

Bilaam was jealous of this attribute which the Patriarchs and their descendants had and he did not: "Let my soul die the death of the Yesharim" [Bamidbar 23:10]. The Torah later legislates "You shall do that which is straight and good (yashar v'tov) [Devorim 6:18]. This pasuk is the answer to the ubiquitous question "Where is it written that I am not allowed to...?" This command, which later appears in the book of Devorim, is first modeled for us by the Patriarchs, and even before that by Hashem Himself in the Book of Bereshis.

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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