



THE LEARNING IS
FOR A MERIT FOR
THE HOLY AUTHOR
OUR TEACHER
HARAV SHIMSHON
CHAIM BEN REB
NACHMAN MICHAEL
NACHMANI.
PASSED AWAY 6
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B'SIYATTA D'SHEMIYAH

ZERA SHIMSHON

Fascinating excerpts and intriguing discourses from the works of the great Gaon and kabbalist Morainu HaRav Shimshon Chaim ben Reb Nachman Michael Nachmani Author of *Zera Shimshon* and *Toldos Shimshon* who lived almost 300 years ago.

HE PROMISED THAT WHOEVER LEARNS HIS WORKS WILL SEE HELP WITH CHILDREN, LONG LIFE, AND PARNASSAH. MANY PEOPLE CAN ATTEST TO THEIR PERSONAL SALVATIONS!

Parshas Noach

וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס וַיַּרְא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי הִשְׁחִית כָּל בָּשָׂר אֶת דְּרָכָו עַל הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים לִנְפֹשׁ קָץ כָּל בָּשָׂר כֹּא לִפְנֵי כִּי מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּגִיעֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּנִי מְשַׁחֲתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ (בראשית ו/א-יג)

And the earth was corrupt before *Hashem*, and the earth became full of robbery. And *Hashem* saw the earth, and behold it had become corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth. And *Hashem* said to Noach, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth has become full of robbery because of them, and behold I am destroying them with the earth. (*Bereishis* 6:11–13)

Before describing the *Mabul* itself, the *Torah* first tells the generation had become deeply corrupt, and the earth was filled with robbery which caused *Hashem* to bring a *mabul* on the world.

Zera Shimshon points out, however, that from the *pessukim* describing their sins, it is not clear what role each sin played in bringing about their punishment. Was immorality the primary sin and robbery secondary? Maybe robbery was the more serious sin? Were the two equally responsible? Or did each one play a different role in sealing their fate?

The first *possuk* mentions two sins: immorality and robbery which implies that both were equal. (Our editions of *Rashi* add idolatry to the explanation of "*vatishacheis*," while earlier textual versions mention only immorality. It would seem that *Zera Shimshon* had this earlier version before him.) The next *possuk* mentions only their immorality, which would seem to indicate that this was the more serious sin. Yet in the following *possuk*, when *Hashem* tells Noach that He is going to destroy the generation, He explicitly gives robbery as the reason: "for the earth has become full of robbery because of them." Their immorality is mentioned only by allusion in the words "*v'hineni mashchisam*"—"and behold I am destroying them"—which echoes the earlier description, "*v'hinei nishchasa*," referring to their immorality. This would seem to indicate the opposite: that robbery was the primary cause of their punishment.

Zera Shimshon explains that in the beginning of Sefer Devarim the incident of the Golden Calf is referred

to with the words *Di-Zahav*; *Di*—spelled *daled* and *yud* and alludes to the word *dai*—enough and *Zahav*—gold.

The *Gemara* explains that although *Di Zahav* was mentioned as part of Moshe *Rabeinu's* rebuke of *Bnei Yisroel* for the sin of the Golden Calf, those very words also were a part of his defense of them. Moshe argued that their making and worshiping the Golden Calf did not come simply from maliciousness or spite. They did not get up one morning and say to themselves, "Let's do something to make *Hashem* angry." Rather, one of the factors that led to their sin was the tremendous amount of gold that *Hashem* had given them—so much that they could say, *dai*, "Enough!"

The *Gemara* gives a parable to explain this: "A lion does not roar over a basket of straw, but over a basket of meat." In other words, great abundance itself can sometimes lead a person astray. *Hashem* had given *Bnei Yisroel* such tremendous wealth that this abundance became one of the factors that contributed to their sin. Moshe argued that this had to be taken into account when judging what they had done. The *Gemara* concludes that *Hashem* accepted Moshe's argument.

Zera Shimshon learns from this that *Hashem* does not judge a person's actions in isolation, as though they took place in a vacuum. He takes into account the circumstances that led the person to sin and other outside factors that contributed to what he did.

A person always is responsible for what he does, but the strength of the temptation and circumstances beyond his control—such as the great abundance of gold that *Hashem* gave *Bnei Yisroel*—can lessen the severity of his guilt. When powerful circumstances

beyond his control contribute to the sin, those circumstances can reduce the degree of blame and punishment, even though they do not remove responsibility completely.

According to this, *Zera Shimshon* explains that the main sin of the generation of the *Mabul* was their immorality. But their breakdown did not begin there. Just as the sin of the Golden Calf was preceded by the tremendous wealth that *Hashem* had given *Bnei Yisroel*, *Chazal* (Sanhedrin 108a) teach that *Hashem* had likewise blessed the generation of the *Mabul* with great prosperity. Their abundance and comfortable lives contributed to their corruption. They could therefore have argued, much as Moshe did on behalf of *Bnei Yisroel*, that their wrongdoing did not warrant such a severe punishment as the destruction of the world, since the very prosperity that *Hashem* had given them had also contributed to their downfall.

However, says *Zera Shimshon*, their robbery destroyed that defense. Stealing does not result from having too much; if anything, it reflects the desire to take even more than one already has. Their robbery therefore showed that their corruption could not be blamed on the abundance that *Hashem* had given them. Since their greed came from within, it revealed that their immorality was also not the result of their circumstances, but stemmed from a deep corruption of character.

In other words, immorality was their primary sin, but on that alone there might still have been room to mitigate their punishment because their affluence, that was granted to them by *Hashem*, had contributed to it. Their robbery, however, removed that defense.

According to *Zera Shimshon*, the *pessukim* now fit together nicely. The first *possuk* mentions both

immorality and robbery, describing the two sins of the generation. The second emphasizes immorality, showing that this was their primary sin. The third *possuk*, which speaks of their punishment, emphasizes robbery, because it was the robbery that removed any possible defense and left them fully liable for the severity of the decree.

While *Zera Shimshon's* words address the *Dor HaMabul*, the lesson applies to our time as well. Before judging others, especially young people who seem distant from the values we hope for, we should remember that *Hashem* does not judge a person's actions in isolation. He takes into account the circumstances, influences, and struggles that helped bring a person to where he is. A teenager who struggles with speech, dress, or observance may be dealing with pain, confusion, family circumstances, or other difficulties that we know nothing about. Just like *Hashem* judges by taking everything into account we should also.

We understand this very well when someone judges us. We immediately think of the circumstances that explain what we did: "I was exhausted," "I had a very difficult day," or "If only he knew what I grew up with." We know that these things do not always excuse our actions, but we also know that they matter. We should extend that same understanding to others and take their circumstances into account before judging them harshly. And when we do, *Hashem* will judge us in the same way, as *Chazal* teach: "*HaDan es chaveiro l'chaf zechus, danin oso l'zechus*"—one who judges another favorably will himself be judged favorably.

(Adapted by Rabbi Shevach Pepper from *Zera Shimshon Parshas Noach Derush 4*)

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עָשָׂה לָךְ תִּבְתָּ עֲצִי גִפֹּר קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַתְּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֶּפֶר. (בראשית ו/יד)

The *Medrash* teaches that Noach spent 120 years planting and cutting cedar trees to build the ark. Whenever people asked why he was working on such a massive project, Noach told them that *Hashem* was going to bring a flood to destroy the world because of the generation's misdeeds. Instead of taking his warning seriously, they scoffed, "If *Hashem* brings a flood, it will be only on your house!"

Zera Shimshon, quoting the *Mefarshim*, asks: how could Noach's generation believe that Noach, of all people, would be punished while they got off scot-free?

Didn't they recognize that he was far more of a *tzaddik* than they were?

Zera Shimshon explains their thinking based on the *Medrash* (*Zohar* 87b) that faults Noach for acting differently than Moshe. After the Golden Calf, when *Hashem* told Moshe He wanted to destroy *Bnei Yisroel*, Moshe *davened* and pleaded for *Klal Yisroel*. But when *Hashem* told Noach He would destroy the whole world, Noach ignored the coming tragedy and built an ark only to save himself and his family.

Based on this, the people argued that since Noah cared only for his own survival and never *davened* for the rest of humanity, he was more guilty than they were. Their reasoning was twisted but psychologically convenient, and sadly not uncommon. Deep down they knew they had filled the world with violence, deceit, and immorality. Yet instead of facing their guilt, they found a scapegoat in Noah, claiming that he, not they, was responsible for their downfall.

It is like patients who ignore the doctor's instructions and, when their condition worsens, blame the doctor for not insisting more strongly or explaining more clearly, as if their own stubbornness were his failure.

The truth is, their reasoning was not entirely baseless, because *Tanach* does record leaders being held accountable for failing to help their generation. In *Megillas Esther*, Mordechai warned Esther that if she refused to plead with Achashverosh for *Klal Yisroel*, "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish." Someone in a position to help who stays passive can be held responsible, even if salvation comes through other means.

But the generation of the *Mabul* distorted this idea. Mordechai never meant that if Esther stayed silent and the people failed to change, she alone would be destroyed while *Klal Yisroel* was saved. He meant that *Hashem* would find another messenger to awaken *Klal Yisroel* to *teshuvah*. Noah's generation twisted this true Torah concept to claim they would be saved without any repentance at all, while the only righteous man among them would be punished.

Similarly, the *Gemara* in *Makkos* teaches that a *Kohen Gadol* who could have *davened* that no one in his generation kill accidentally, yet failed to out of

indifference, was considered spiritually blemished and a candidate for punishment. He was punished not for doing wrong, but for not preventing it. Yet even here, the accidental killer still bore responsibility for his own act. The *Kohen Gadol's* failure was an added shortcoming, not the sole cause. Noah's generation ignored this distinction entirely and placed the full weight of their corruption on Noah, which only exposed how deep their self-deception ran.

Still, as the *Medrash* teaches, Noah was not entirely without fault. Why did Noah, the only person in *Tanach* explicitly called a *tzaddik*, not recognize the need to *daven* for his generation?

Zera Shimshon first suggests that Noah lacked *z'chus avos*, the merit of his ancestors that Moshe, Esther, and the *Kohen Gadol* had. Because of this, he felt his prayers wouldn't be accepted. But *Zera Shimshon* rejects this explanation, because a person must do the minimum even if he doubts he will succeed.

Instead, *Zera Shimshon* explains that Noah reasoned his generation was so steeped in corruption, dishonesty, and violence that his *tefillos* could not help them and might even be inappropriate. Noah's silence was not callousness but conviction. He believed *Hashem's* justice required the world to be cleansed, and that his role was to prepare for survival, not to intercede.

However, *Chazal* teach that Noah was mistaken. No matter how far a person has fallen, we are obligated to *daven* for him. Whether *Hashem* answers is His decision. Our duty is to try, to care, and to do everything possible to help others return to the right path, no matter how hopeless they may appear.

(Adapted from *Zera Shimshon Parshas Noach Derush 2*)

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אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלָּךְ נֹחַ: (בראשית ו/ח-י)

These are the generations of Noah. In his generation Noah was a righteous man; and was without blemish; Noah walked with *Hashem*. Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yeffes." (*Bereishis* 6:8-10)

Zera Shimshon asks: since Noah's sons were also saved from the Flood, why does it say only, "And Noah found favor in the eyes of *Hashem*," and not, "Noah and his sons found favor"?

He answers based on *Rashi*, who explains that in the time of the *Mabul*—the Great Flood—only those one hundred years and older were held accountable for

their actions. Just as today boys under thirteen and girls under twelve are not responsible for their deeds, so then, people under one hundred were viewed as children, without full intellect or moral agency. They were not rewarded or punished, since their actions were merely reflections of their parents and surroundings—like parrots repeating what they hear.

Clearly, a parrot isn't guilty for coarse speech—it's only echoing its owner. Therefore, it could not say that Noach's sons found favor, since their good deeds were not their own. Even if they behaved righteously, they were not credited with favor before *Hashem*.

While it is generally true that children often mirror their parents, this is not absolute.. The *Chafetz Chaim* qualified it adding to the saying, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"— "unless there is a strong wind." Meaning: when a child is protected from harmful influences, he reflects his parents' ways. But when exposed to damaging environments—bad friends, improper media, or corrupt society—the "wind" can carry him far from home. His behavior may then reflect those influences more than his parents' example.

According to the above, *Zera Shimshon* asks another question. Later, the *Torah* states that during the *Mabul*, *Hashem* destroyed all living humans except Noach, his sons, and their wives. *Zera Shimshon* asks: if only those over one hundred were accountable, why did all other children perish?

He offers two explanations.

The first is that, although those under one hundred had no sins of their own, they also lacked merit. Only Noach's children were saved through their father's *zechus*. The others, being part of a corrupt generation, perished along with it.

The second explanation is that Noach's merit alone could not save even his family. Rather, his children were saved because their *chinuch*—their upbringing and moral training—was so strong that it was evident they would continue in his path once they reached maturity. They were still "children," but their direction was already set. Hence, they were not saved for present merit but for their future righteousness. By contrast, the other under-hundred-year-olds had no

such *chinuch*. They were shaped entirely by a generation steeped in corruption, and since their future would follow that same path, they shared its fate.

According to this, *Zera Shimshon* resolves another difficulty. Why does the *Torah* again mention that Noach was righteous and had three sons, when it already said this at the end of the previous parsha? The repetition appears just before the *Mabul* to explain why only Noach's family was spared. It emphasizes that they were unique—either saved in Noach's merit or because they were raised in the home of a truly *ehrllicher* man whose influence shaped their destiny.

Parents invest enormous effort and resources to ensure their children's success and *ehrllichkeit*. *Zera Shimshon* teaches another path—less costly but more demanding: personal growth. When parents strive to elevate themselves, their children rise with them. Even if one does not reach great heights, the sincerity of one's *chinuch* will still bear fruit. Yet the warning of the *Chafetz Chaim* remains: even the best *chinuch* needs protection from the "wind." Parents must ensure that their children's primary influences—friends, teachers, and environment—share their values. Without this, even the strongest tree can lose its apple to the storm.

In short, *Zera Shimshon* reveals that the verse singles out Noach's favor with *Hashem* because only he had achieved righteousness through his own deeds. His sons, though spared, were not yet spiritually independent. They were saved either through their father's merit or because they had been trained to one day walk in his ways. The lesson endures: we cannot directly hand our children our righteousness—but we can live it before them so vividly that, even in a storm, they will find their way home.

(Adapted from *Zera Shimshon Parshas Noach Derush 1*)

HaRav Shimshon Nachmani, author of Zera Shimshon lived in Italy about 300 years ago in the time of the Or HaChaim HaKodesh

HaRav Shimshon Nachmani had one child who died in his lifetime (hence the name "Zera Shimshon") and in the preface he promises for people who learn his sefarim after he dies "... And your eyes will see children and grandchildren like the offshoots of an olive tree around your tables, wise and understanding with houses filled with all manner of good things... and wealth and honor..."

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