

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

3 Cheshvan, 5769 Vol. 10, No. 2

Parashas Noach

“AND THE DOVE CAME TO HIM IN THE EVENING, AND BEHOLD AN OLIVE LEAF, FRESHLY PLUCKED, WAS IN HER MOUTH...”

(BEREISHIS 8:11)

THE TORRENTIAL RAINS of the flood ceased. Noach sent out a dove to search for dry land and the *yonah* – dove – returned carrying an olive leaf. The Gemara (Eruvin 18b) tells us that by bringing the bitter tasting leaf, something a dove would not ordinarily eat, the *yonah* was in essence saying: “I would rather eat food as bitter as olive leaves, from the hand of Hashem, than something sweet as honey from the hand of flesh and blood.” Rashi comments on this Gemara that the words, “flesh and blood” refer to Noach.

Why does Rashi point this out?

Why does Rashi point this out? Is it not obvious that the dove’s comment was referring to Noach?

Rashi is highlighting the fact that the *yonah* preferred bitter leaves, found on its own, rather than relying **even** on Noach. Our sages tell us that Noach spent the entire journey feeding and caring for his charges – the animals. Noach was not satisfied with feeding all the animals the same food at allotted meal times. He fed each animal the food it preferred and served it at the time it was accustomed to eat. This became an around-the-clock job that didn’t allow Noach to sleep, not only the forty days and nights of the flood, but the full year that elapsed from the start of the flood until they left the ark. Noach was obviously a man devoted to *chesed* and cared to perform these acts of kindness in the best way possible. Nevertheless, the dove preferred bitter leaves, rather than relying on a man as kind and caring as Noach was.

The dove preferred bitter leaves

We all know how painful it is when our request for a favor is denied and how badly we feel when we receive a favor given grudgingly. Rashi is giving us a much deeper insight into the nobility and greatness of man. Created in the image of G-d, our *neshomah* – soul – feels pain at having to turn to another person for our needs, instead of directly receiving it from G-d Himself. As we pray in *Birkas HaMazon*, “... let us not be in need of the gifts of human hands or of their loans, but only of Your hand, which is full, open, holy and ample.” No matter how graciously our request is received, it still hurts to take something, even from the closest friend. A poor person who knocks on the door of his generous neighbor and is treated like a respected guest, leaving the house with a large donation, still feels a subconscious twinge of pain.

Even a favor given with a smile is distressing

The *yonah* was telling Noach, and all of us, that man is extremely sensitive. If we realize that even a favor given with a smile is distressing, we can begin to understand how much more suffering a person undergoes when he receives a favor given grudgingly. Bearing this sensitivity in mind, when someone asks of us a favor we must expend the utmost energy to fulfill his needs both graciously and compassionately.