



Noach – The Ultimate Choice

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Dedicated in memory of those murdered and in the merit of a *refuah shleyma* for those who have been injured in the recent terror attacks in Israel.

The waters have receded, the earth's surface has dried and it is now that Noach and his family must begin the awesome mission of rebuilding humanity. Upon exiting the ark, Noach offers *korbanos* (sacrificial offerings) from the various "pure" animals (their kosher identity would become known later in the Torah).

The Torah records God's dramatic response to the offerings.

And the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma, and the Lord said to Himself, "I will no longer curse the earth because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and I will no longer smite all living things as I have done" (Bereishis 8:21).

What was it about this offering that moved God in this way? What was so "pleasing" about this *korban* that it solidified God's resolve to never again destroy mankind?

Rav Avraham Tzukerman zt'l (founder and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivot Bnai Akiva) explains that Noach knew God wanted him to offer a *korban* upon exiting the ark. The fact that God commanded him to bring seven pairs of each animal deemed a "*biheyama tehora, pure animal*" (i.e. animals that would ultimately be deemed kosher species) led Noach to understand that some of these animals were to be used for sacrificial service. However, God left Noach the opportunity (choice) to decide which animals from the group to sacrifice. Noach could have offered up the weakest, scrawniest, most undesirable animals. After all, God doesn't really "need" the offering, but we can use the strongest animals to repopulate the species. Instead Noach chooses to take the more healthy and desirable of the animals and place them on the altar of God.

Noach had a profound and fundamental choice to make. In this first act of service of God, should I just "get by"? Should I settle for mediocrity? Or should I do whatever is within my power to actualize my personal greatness and aim higher. Noach chooses the later - he offers the best of the animals showing himself, his family and future generations that we cannot build a world on the rickety pillars of mediocrity.

Whenever I read the story of the flood I am always troubled by one basic question - is it possible that all of humanity had become so depraved and evil that they deserved destruction? Is it really possible that Noach was the only righteous man? Perhaps, we can suggest that most of the world was not really evil - they were just indifferent. They saw evil occurring around them, accepted the mediocrity of their circumstances and went on with life. At some point in time, settling for mediocrity yields indifference and indifference allows for all types of evil and societal ills to take root.

When Noach steps off the ark and offers the best of the herd, God is filled with confidence and hope. *VA'YARACH HASHEM ES REYACH HA'NICHIOACH, God smelled the pleasing aroma*. Why was it so pleasing? Because the new father of mankind did not settle for mediocrity, he made the decision to reach higher. When God saw that man possessed the capacity to thrive, when God saw what man could truly become, He was so infused with hope and optimism that He guaranteed the future of man in this world for all time.

Rav Tzukerman zt'l related a moving account from his childhood. At age six, out of his great craving for Torah, he was skipped from first to second grade, and then from second to third grade. By age eleven he had "outgrown" the local *chadarim* (religious schools) and was sent away from home to learn in the great yeshivos of Lithuania. Although, his intellect was highly developed and he knew his place was in the yeshiva, every night he would wake from the longing and pain of missing his parents, and would pass most of the night weeping silently into his pillow. This is how he spent his first two years away from home. When asked why he didn't ask his parents to return home - he offered the following explanation: *"I knew I had a choice, I could go home and find incredible happiness and contentment with my family but I would not have the same opportunities for growth. I chose the path of growth."*

Each and every morning we walk out of our ark into a new day and a new world. Every day we must consciously decide if we are satisfied with mediocrity or if we are willing to aim higher and achieve more. Let us hope that we find the strength to thrive and exceed expectations. May God experience the *reyach nichioach, pleasing aroma* from the lives we lead and the people we become.