

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Noach

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Roy *ben* Tzvi Ya'akov a"h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Feed the Animals

Having focused last week on the topic of the dining options of Adam Harishon, we turn now to a similar issue pertaining to this week's *parshah*: namely, the endeavor of feeding the inhabitants of No'ach's *teivah* (ark).

While appearing initially straightforward, the *passuk* that addresses the subject, upon closer examination, actually raises some significant perplexities. Hashem instructs No'ach to prepare sustenance for the duration of the upcoming flood:

וַאֲתָהּ קַח-לָךְ מִכָּל-מַאֲכָל... וְאָסַפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ וְלָהֶם לְאֹכֶלָהּ.

“And you, take for you from all food... and gather it to you, and it will be for you and for them to eat” (*Bereishis* 6:21-22).

What seems most puzzling about the wording of the *passuk* is that it seems to contain several superfluities. Right at the beginning, we encounter repetition: “And you, take for **you**.” Furthermore, an entire phrase here appears completely unnecessary. After telling No'ach to procure food, why must he be told “that it will be for you and for them to eat.” After all, isn't that kind of the point of food?

Bon Apetit

But perhaps the greatest issue to be raised here is the question of logistics. For those who appreciate thrilling, wondrous sights, one of the most remarkable spectacles to behold is feeding time at the hippo exhibit in the Biblical Zoo in Yerushalayim. Summoned by the keeper at mealtime, the hippos approach, their huge mouths agape. The keeper lifts a watermelon or two into the air, and then hurls it towards the cavernous openings. The hippos' great jaws come crashing down, a gush of pink spray spewing forth from between them. This is followed by a few buckets-full of cucumbers, any number of heads of lettuce and a plethora of other vegetables. By the time the exercise is complete, what basically amounts to the contents of the entire produce section at the local supermarket has been emptied into the animals' gullets.

And this is just *one* meal for *one or two* animals. Bear in mind that the *teivah* was to house every single living species of the entire animal kingdom (excluding fish). Furthermore, it was not just one day for which No'ach had to provide. He had to store enough provisions to last throughout their sojourn in the *teivah*, the duration of which is recorded in the Mishnah in *Eduyos* (2:10):

מִשְׁפֵּט דוֹר הַמַּבּוּל, שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר הַדָּשׁ.

“The Flood spanned a twelve-month period.”

This means, of course, that No'ach had to bring enough to feed every single one of earth's creatures for an entire year. How could he possibly gather such a gargantuan pile of provisions, and where, pray tell, was he supposed to put this astronomical volume of (perishable) supplies in a *teivah* of limited size, already packed with doubles (at least) of every creature that existed in the world?

Obviously, miraculous intervention was necessary. R' Yehonasan Eibshitz (*Tiferes Yehonasan*) describes the nature and mechanics of this wondrous contingency, at the same time shedding much light on the proper understanding of the *passuk*.

A Little Planning Can Go a Long Way...

Miracles, by definition, are inherently supernatural; nevertheless, we do find that Hashem employs certain guiding principles in performing them. While He is the Omnipotent One, capable of any feat, it appears that Hashem exercised His ability to fashion something “*yeish mei'ayin*” (literally out of thin air) only at the beginning of the creation of the world. Since then, He deals mainly with “*yeish mi'yeish*” (making something out of pre-existing material).

Consider the miracle wrought through the prophet Elisha on behalf of the destitute widow (*Melachim II 4:1-7*). The woman had been in danger of losing her children, as the hardhearted creditor threatened to seize and impress them into servitude to satisfy an unpaid loan. Elisha provided the solution to her quandary. He instructed her to take her sole possession – a single container of oil – and empty its contents into another vessel. She did so, and – lo and behold – while the new vessel was filled, the old one had not emptied. She again poured the contents into another vessel, with the same result; new oil was yielded, while the original stock had not depleted. She repeated this exercise a number of times, filling many vessels. She was then able to sell this windfall of new oil and pay off the creditor.

It is noteworthy that the oil did not simply appear from nowhere; it was necessary to begin with a base of pre-existing matter, from which new oil was miraculously generated (*cf. Mishnas Chayim, Vayeishev, 5770*).

The same principle, explains R' Yehonasan, was manifest in No'ach's pre-flood preparations. And this is apparent from the *passuk*. Looking carefully, we see that Hashem actually instructed No'ach to procure enough food *just for himself* – “You, take **for you**.” It was certainly possible to gather and store this limited volume. But this, Hashem assured him, would be the “base” from which the animals' provisions would generate upon demand.

This accounts for the *passuk*'s repetition. Hashem first instructed No'ach to gather food: “Take for you from all food.” But, as mentioned, this was No'ach's personal store. How was he to provide for the animals? The *passuk* continues: “It will be for you **and for them** to eat.” Far from superfluous information, Hashem was relating to No'ach something eye-opening indeed: He need not be concerned for the animals' welfare, for their needs would be amply supplied. And the supply would come from No'ach's own provisions, through Hashem's wondrous, guiding hand.

The *passuk* goes on to relate No'ach's compliance: “And No'ach did all that Hashem commanded him.” At first glance, this also seems unnecessary; is it “news” that No'ach did as he was told? In light of his approach, R' Yehonasan explains that the verse is in fact relaying No'ach's praise. He was about to embark on a major undertaking, which could only be successful through miraculous intervention. But No'ach trusted in Hashem and faithfully fulfilled His command.