

Parshat Noach – Rabbi David Mahler

Immediately after *Noach* and his family are saved from the flood, *Noach* offers a *korban* in an act of gratitude to *Hashem* for having allowed him and his family to survive. A short while afterwards, the *Torah* tells us that *Noach's* next act was to plant a vineyard. From that point on, things begin to spiral downward for him. *Noach* becomes overly intoxicated and debases himself. According to the *pesukm*, he uncovers himself inside his tent in an act of complete embarrassment.

The *Torah* tells us that two of *Noach's* three sons, *Shem* and *Yefes*, come to his assistance:

וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וַיִּפֹּת אֶת-הַשְּׂמֶלֶה וַיִּשְׂימוּ עַל-שִׁכְמָם שְׂנֵי־הָאָחִים וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיוּת וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת עֲרֹנוֹת אֲבֵיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם אַחֲרָיוּת וְעֲרֹנוֹת אֲבֵיהֶם  
לֹא רָאוּ:

*Shem* and *Yefes* took the garment, put it on their shoulder, walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness, they faced backwards and didn't see their father's nakedness.

*Rashi* is bothered by the grammatical usage of the word *Vayikach*, and he took. Why did the *Torah* choose to employ the singular form of the word and not the plural, *Vayikchu*, since they were seemingly two people, *Shem* and *Yefes*, taking hold of the garment in order to cover their father? *Rashi* explains that the verb is in the singular form because only *Shem* took the initiative in this virtuous act. *Yefes* simply joined along afterwards and followed his brother's lead.

Rav Gedalyah Schorr, in *Ohr Gedalyahu*, (*Moadim, Chanukah*) beautifully develops the idea proposed by *Rashi*. He explains that from a distance, both *Shem* and *Yefes* seems to perform the identical, compassionate and respectful deed of covering their father and protecting his *kavod*. Yet, only *Shem* was rewarded with the promise of *Hashem's* presence, while *Yefes* was given the rewards of external beauty, art and culture. How could they have received such different rewards for the same act? The *Ohr Gedalyahu* powerfully explains that in essence, their rewards were fair and just.

*Yefes* was motivated to cover his father by external factors (what will the neighbors say?) and so his reward was external. He followed *Shem's* lead because he did not want to be seen as having “done the wrong thing” in other people's eyes. However, seeing his father in such a compromised state did not affect him at an internal level. *Shem*, by contrast, was broken by the site of his father lying unclothed and naked. *Shem* is motivated by intrinsic reasons and so he was rewarded with a gift of intrinsic value. Rav Schorr emphasizes the destructiveness of beauty that is only external.

This interpretation of the *Ohr Gedlyahu* teaches us a profound lesson in parenting. Effectively, he is pointing to the distinction between *middos* and politeness. *Yefes* was civil and polite. He acted according to the socially accepted norms, but his actions were merely external. They didn't penetrate his being nor were they an outgrowth of who he was as a person. On the other hand, *Shem's* behavior was fueled by *middos*. His actions sprung from a pure internal self. *Shem* was a *ba'al middos*.

As parents, we must be focused on not only whether our children are merely polite but whether they “feel” their actions. For example, a mere thank you is acceptable but a thank you triggered by a deep sense of gratitude is what we are striving for. Are apologies forced or coerced or are they given because of a feeling inside that motivates them?

As adults as well, this keen awareness should be reflected upon often. Are we merely polite? A Jew values *middos* over manners.