

Parshat Noach 5779

At every Jewish simcha we pour drinks, usually strong alcohol and wish each other להיים. But do you know who was the first person to wish להיים ?

When Noach exited the Tayvo , the Posuk says כרם ויטע איש האדמה ויחל נח *“Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard”*

The Midrash Tanchuma tells us that when Noach came out of the Tayvo there was no vegetation or trees in the world as everything was destroyed in the flood. He had taken samples of every plant and tree into the Tayvo and was about to plant a sapling vine to grow a vineyard, when the Soton came to him and asked Noach – “what are you doing?” Noach said “I am planting a vineyard which makes sweet grapes and makes people happy.” The Soton asked Noach –“can I become your partner?” Asked Noach – “what are you going to contribute to this partnership?”

So the Soton brought a lamb, schechted it and its blood dropped onto the vine sapling, he then brought a lion, schechted it and its blood dropped onto the sapling, he then brought a pig and did the same. And fourthly, he brought a monkey and schechted it and its blood dropped onto the sapling

Noach wanted to know – “what are you doing?” Answered the Soton –“since this is the only vine sapling in the world, the only way to create more vineyards in the future will be to use cuttings from this sapling. For the rest of history, every time someone drinks wine, there will be a tiny element of this first sapling in it with the lamb, lion, pig & monkey blood mixed in it.”

Explained the Soton – “before a man drinks wine, he is sweet and innocent like a lamb. After drinking some wine he becomes like a lion and says – ‘there is no one like me in the world’. If he drinks more, wine, then he becomes like a pig and makes a mess of himself. If he drinks even more, then he becomes like a monkey and jumps and dances around on the table. That is why I spilled the blood of these animals on the vine sapling.”

And then the Soton said – “LeChaim - we are partners!”

And everything that the Soton had predicted, which happens to people who drink too much, happened shortly afterwards to Noach when he drank too much wine. As the Torah records, he drank too much, became drunk and revealed himself with all the consequences afterwards when he cursed his grandchild.

What went wrong? At the beginning of the sedra Hashem called Noach – Ish Tzaddik – *a righteous man*. Yet now when he came out of the Tayvo, he had fallen in madrega and the Torah calls him Ish HaAdomo – *man of the ground*.

The Midrash contrasts Noach with Moshe. When Moshe arrived in Midyan the daughters of Yisro met him at the well and called him Ish Mitzri – *an Egyptian man*. At the end of his life the Torah calls Moshe the highest accolade Ish HoElokim – *a man of G-d*. Says the Midrash, each one of us in our lives can rise up from an Egyptian man to a Man of G-d or, chas vesholom, drop from being a Tzaddik down to a man of the Earth.

Explains the Midrash –lets look at our priorities in life. The Torah records that the first thing that Noach did when leaving the Ark was plant a vineyard. He took all crops into the Tayvo with him and should have planted wheat or barley to focus on food production for the benefit of everyone but instead he wanted alcohol, so he debased himself by planting a vine sapling first and ignoring what the other members of his family needed – bread. He concentrated on his own needs instead of others

Contrast that with Moshe who, from the time he took over leading Klal Yisroel through the Midbor, did nothing else but look after his flock, praying for them , pleading with Hashem to forgive them, asking for food for them. That made him rise from an Egyptian man to a man of G-d; whereas Noach’s selfishness turned him from a Tzaddik to an earthly man.

The lesson for us is that if we want to improve ourselves to become a man of G-d rather than a man of the Earth, we need to be focussed on others, trying to help others whether by being involved in communal activities, financially assisting poorer people, giving tzedoko or inviting less fortunate people into our homes etc. The alternative is only to be interested in our own life, just worry about ourselves and what we need.

What is important to us in our lives? When we wake up in the morning do we rush to check our emails and WhatsApps or rush off to Shul to make a connection with Hashem? When we describe ourselves to others, are we ‘a doctor, businessman, lawyer, jeweller, accountant etc who works all day’ or are we ‘an Orthodox Jew who uses his work to provide parnoso to his family ’. Where do our priorities lie?

We can either use our potential and innate abilities to grow to become Ish HoElokim or chas vesholom drop to be Ish HaAdomo. The choice is ours. Let’s choose wisely.