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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

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פרשת נח

וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וַיִּפֹּת אֶת הַשְּׂמָלָה וַיְשִׂימוּ עַל שִׁכְמָם שְׂנֵיהֶם, וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיִת, וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת עֲרוֹת אֲבֵיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם אַחֲרָיִת וְעֲרוֹת אֲבֵיהֶם לֹא רָאוּ. וַיִּיקֶץ נֹחַ מִיַּיִנו וַיֵּדַע וכו'. וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי שָׁם וַיְהִי כְנֻעַן עֶבֶד לְמוֹ. (בראשית ט, כג-כו)
And Shem and Yefes took a garment, laid it upon their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. Noah awoke from the wine and realised ... And he said, "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shem; and Canaan shall be a slave to them." (Bereishis 9:23-26)

This week's *Sidrah* recounts the shameful incident involving Noah and his son Cham. While Cham humiliated his father, Shem and Yefes chose to cover Noah, not looking at his nakedness. When Noah awoke and realised what had transpired, he cursed the descendants of Canaan. He then blessed Hashem, the G-d of Shem.

Rashi explains that Noah blessed Hashem, the G-d of Shem, Who was destined to fulfil His promise to Shem's offspring by giving them the land of Canaan. Rashi's comment addresses the difficulty of why Noah chose to bless Hashem rather than Shem directly. Through his explanation, he clarifies that Noah was indeed blessing Shem, expressing confidence that Hashem would grant Shem's descendants, Klal Yisroel, the land of Canaan.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* offers another explanation based on the words of the Midrash Rabbah (*Eikev* 3:3). The Midrash states: *מֵאֲמוּנָתוֹ שֶׁל בָּשָׂר וְדָם, אֵת יוֹדֵעַ אֲמוּנָתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא*, *from the trustworthiness of man, you can discern the trustworthiness of Hashem*. Observing the elevated conduct and behaviour of a great and complete person allows one to begin to recognise Hashem's virtues and qualities. Similarly, when Noah witnessed Shem's admirable and fine behaviour, he was inspired to bless Hashem.

This concept can be understood by recognising that every individual is created with a *neshamah*, which is a *חֵלֶק אֱלֹהִים מִמַּעַל* - a portion of G-d from above. This imbues each person with immense potential for elevated behaviour and noble *middos*. This idea is reflected in last week's *Sidrah*, where the *possuk* (1:27) states that all of humanity was created *בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים*, *in the image of G-d*. The Meforshim explain that by creating us to resemble Him, Hashem has endowed us with a lofty nature and character. Through this resemblance, one can appreciate the greatness of Hashem.

The Dubno Maggid clarifies this concept with a *mashal*. If a blind person were told that bright light is good, they would never be able to appreciate its benefits, as they have never experienced it. Similarly,

someone who has never seen different colours cannot understand their enjoyment and beauty because it is a foreign concept to them. The same applies to appreciating Hashem's greatness.

The only way for us to begin to grasp the many praises and titles ascribed to Hashem is by acting in ways that reflect those descriptions. By connecting with the praises we use to describe Hashem, we start comprehending His greatness, goodness, and righteousness. The more we perfect ourselves by imitating and resembling Hashem, the better we can understand the extent of His prominence and superiority.

Accordingly, since all human behaviour is rooted in the **צְלֵם אֱלֹהִים** with which people are endowed, every noble action and trait exhibited by individuals reflects the greatness of Hashem. After Noach observed Shem's admirable behaviour, he gained a deeper appreciation of Hashem's greatness and subsequently blessed Him.

The Midrash (ibid.) tells a story about R' Shimon ben Shetach, who once bought a donkey from an Arab. His *talmidim* discovered a precious stone hanging from the donkey's neck and came to R' Shimon, celebrating what they thought was a gift from Hashem. However, R' Shimon replied that he had only purchased the donkey and not the jewel. He then returned the stone to the grateful Arab, who exclaimed, "Blessed be the G-d of R' Shimon ben Shetach!"

The Etz Yosef explains that the Arab appreciated R' Shimon's honesty, recognising it as a reflection of his being a part of Hashem, as the *possuk* (*Devorim* 32:9) states: **כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עִמּוֹ, יַעֲקֹב חֶבְלֵי נַחֲלָתוֹ**, *For Hashem's portion is His people; Yaakov is the measure of His inheritance*. The Arab concluded that from the greatness of R' Shimon as a fragment, it is evident how magnificent the whole – Hashem – is. This recognition led him to praise Hashem. This is as explained above - our behaviour reflects the standing of Hashem, our Creator, Who made us in His image.

This lesson should always be in our minds: we are created in Hashem's image, and it is our responsibility to act in ways that reflect favourably upon Him. Hashem has given us the ability to live up to this ideal, and may our behaviour always serve to glorify His Name.

This Devar Torah is adapted from **ספר וענפיה ארזי אל** and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.