



A Full Heart

Adapted from a Shmuess by Rabbi Stulberger

Parshas Noach

By Elan Perchik

Having just gone through a number of incredible Yomim Tovim in which we felt a special relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, there is one particular aspect which stands out. And that is the heart of a Jew. Our Torah lives are to be filled with heartfelt focus and dedication. So much of our service of Hashem hinges on this point, as Chazal teach, "*Rachmana liba ba'v*" – "Hashem desires the heart." We are to be consciously attentive while we perform a mitzvah by means of pondering its laws, significance and how it builds upon a beautiful connection we have with our Father in Heaven. It is this message which we are to carry throughout the long upcoming winter and never lose sight of.

Along these lines, a number of commentaries, foremost the Rabbeinu Bachye, note that the Torah is surrounded by the word "*Lev*," heart," with the last letter of the Torah being a *Lamed* and the first letter a *Beis*. The Torah is structured this way to convey the ever important lesson that everything we do related to Torah is to be connected to our heart. We are to daven and learn with passionate emotion, perform a mitzvah with enthusiasm and look to help our fellow Jews with cheerful zeal.

This idea is clearly highlighted in Parshas Noach. Towards the end of the Parsha, as Noach exits from the *teiva*, he plants a vineyard. Upon becoming intoxicated, he exposes himself within his tent, only for his son, Cham, to reveal what has happened. Hearing that their father is laying in disgrace, Shem and Yefes, Noach's two other children, together take a garment and respectfully cover their father. In recording this episode, the Torah states, "*Vayikach Shem v'Yefes es hasimlah*" – "And Shem and Yefes took the garment" and subsequently covered their father.

What is obviously striking upon analyzing the syntax of this Pasuk is the singular use of "*Vayikach*," literally meaning 'And he took,' in relation to two people. Why would the Torah use a singular word to describe an act done both by Shem and Yefes?

Rashi provides an incredible answer. Although both brothers participated in this mitzvah, Shem was "*Misametz yoseir*," put in more effort. It is invariably true that Yefes also covered Noach, but it was Shem who possessed the feeling and sensitivity to carry out this act with utmost focus and dedication. He accomplished this simple act of covering his father with greater purity and emotion than did Yefes.

Reflecting upon this for a moment leaves one bothered even further. All things considered, Yefes was also involved in carrying out this noble deed. Does Hashem

really measure with such exactitude the emotions we have when performing a mitzvah?

And the answer is a resounding yes. Not only what we do, but the way we do it speaks loudly. This is clearly seen by the reward given to Shem and Yefes for respectfully covering their father. Shem received the mitzvah of tzitzis, a commandment which stands meritorious for all of eternity. Yefes, on the other hand, was rewarded that in the times of Moshiach, his descendents will merit burial during the fierce wars of Gog u'Magog. While Yefes' reward is certainly significant, the mitzvah of tzitzis given to Shem and his offspring is far greater.

But there is something even more telling when looking into the details of this episode. The Pasuk's singular phraseology when taken at a literal level can be said to omit Yefes. It is almost as if the Torah is saying that in the eyes of Hakadosh Baruch Hu only one person – Shem – was there covering Noach. It is true that any spectator would say that two people physically carried out this dignified act; but in truth, from the purview of Hashem, the heart of Shem shone forth significantly more than Yefes'.

A boy once approached the legendary Mashgiach, Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, with a question about a proposed shidduch. "Rebbe," the boy explained, "she is wonderful and has sterling character traits. The only problem is that she seems to be too self-centered. What should I do?"

Looking back at the student, the Mashgiach replied, "Let me explain something to you. If this young woman is self-centered, she will make a perfect wife. As of now, she is primarily concerned about herself. But once she gets married, her definition of "me" will expand to include you. She will then be as concerned for you as she is for herself. And once she has children, she will as well look after them as part and parcel of herself. What else could you look for in a wife?"

The same can be said about our relationship with Hashem. We are to expand the definition of "ourselves" and align our will with the will of Hashem. We are to live a life where His concerns are our concerns. It is when such an approach is embraced and our hearts fill up with enthusiastic love for Hashem and His mitzvos that we can then enter into a blissful relationship with Him. He is earnestly waiting for us to welcome Him into our lives. As the Kotzker Rebbe famously remarked, "Where is Hashem? Wherever you let Him in." All we have to do is open the doors of our hearts and let our loving Father enter inside.