BS”D

Parshas Noach

The Unhappy Raven

By Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

As the waters of the great Flood subsided, Noach sent out a raven to scout the land. The raven refused to fly off; it merely circled the ark.

The Midrash gives us the raven’s point of view. The bird complained to Noach and asked, “Why, of all the beasts and fowl, are you sending me?” Noach replied that the world has no use for the raven. It was not kosher, nor was it fit for a sacrifice. Hashem then tells Noach to accept the raven back into the ark. The world does, in fact, need the raven because many, many years later, when the prophet Eliyahu fled from Achav and Izevel (Ahab and Jezebel) who sought to kill him, the ravens would bring him food. (See Melachim I, 17:6)

The Gemora in Sanhedrin (109b) has the following version of the story. The raven offers “a telling rebuke” (*teshuva nitzeches*) to Noach. “You hate me, and your Master (Hashem) hates me,” the raven complained. “Hashem hates me because only one pair of ravens was taken into the ark whereas seven pairs of each kosher bird were taken in. You hate me, too! You could have sent one of the kosher birds on the mission. If I die because of the heat or the cold, my kind will become extinct. And besides,” the raven continued, “I suspect that you have designs on my mate!”

Noach responds to the raven, calling him *rasha*, wicked one. The raven has accused Hashem of hating him. He has accused Noach of planning an outlandish sin. The raven is portrayed here as whiny and obnoxious, self-centered and seeing only the bad of others. Quite a fellow is this Mr. Raven!

And yet, the Talmud says that the raven’s argument was “a telling rebuke.” How can we sympathize with his words?

I would suggest that in addition to the bad character the raven exhibited, we think of the raven as a cruel bird. The sages interpret the passage in Tehillim “[G-d feeds] the young ravens who cry out to Him” as meaning that the ravens refuse to feed their young because they look white as chicks and don’t look like ravens to their parents. So Hashem has to provide food for them. (See Rashi, Tehillim 147:9)

So maybe Noach’s sentiment as expressed in the Midrash, “The world has no use for you,” is correct. The raven epitomizes cruelty and selfishness. And yet, somewhere, somehow, there is a spark of goodness even in the raven. The descendants of our Mr. Raven (and his Mrs., of course,) brought food to the starving prophet. This shows kindness. Despite his obnoxious personality, the raven had a spark of kindness in his soul which was exhibited centuries later by his offspring.

So the raven did have a telling rebuke. There was a purpose for him in the world.

We don’t have to be overly concerned with ravens. We have to be concerned with people. There are some people who seem to have no redeeming quality, nothing that they’re contributing to the world. But G-d did not create anything in vain. Every individual has some good quality in him, not only good, but unique to the world. The sages say if even one Jew would have been missing, the Torah could not have been given. Chassidus teaches that each Jew represents one letter of the Torah. The entire Sefer Torah is disqualified if one letter is missing. Moreover, like a letter in the Torah, each individual is unique, special, one of a kind. Somewhere, somehow that special good quality can and must be discovered.

We should look for that quality in ourselves. We should look for that quality in others. The raven was wrong when he said G-d hates him. Noach was wrong when he said the raven has no purpose. G-d created each and every one of us with a purpose. G-d cares and loves each and every one of us. But we must find that special spark, cultivate and develop it, and bring a blessing to the world.