Jewish Tribune – Noach

**Who are you?**

A man from New York once visited the Brisker Rov in Yerushalayim. The Brisker Rov asked the visitor his name and who he was. “I am so and so and am a lawyer from New York”, he replied.

“And who are you?” asked the Brisker Rov again?

Perhaps he didn’t hear the first time thought the man. “I am so and so and am a lawyer from New York” he repeated.

“And who are you?”

“This is the great Brisker Rov?” thought the man. Interrupting the man’s thoughts, the Brisker Rov explained: “I heard what you said the first time, but that is not how a Jew defines himself. Don’t define yourself by your occupation, don’t describe yourself by the means through which HKBH sends you your parnosso.”

The Brisker Rov said this is one of the important lessons from Maftir Yona, the last public reading of Yom Kippur. Wanting to know the origins of the sleeping passenger, Yona is awoken and asked a series of questions. In response, he simply states: “עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי”. I am a G-d fearing Jew. Indeed, this is the answer to most of life’s questions regarding how we should respond to any given situation.

I came across a book in the summer called Atomic Habits. It is not a Jewish book but was recommended as Elul reading. In this book, the author, Mr James Clear, says that research shows that effective change is not achieved by changing habits but by changing identity.

He gives an example of someone trying to quit smoking. If offered a cigarette, the person can either say “I’m not a smoker” or “No thanks, I’m trying to quit.” The former response is more effective as once he defines himself as a non-smoker his behaviour will mirror his identity and simply put, non-smokers don’t smoke. But the latter response suggests that he is still a smoker and sometimes he will resist temptation and sometimes he won’t.

The goal is not to read a certain book, but to become a reader. The goal is not to run a certain distance but to become fit and healthy.

True behaviour change is identity change as behaviour is usually a reflection of your identity.

As Rav Hutner puts it:

תשובה איז נישט דער טייטש בעסער ווערען, תשובה איז דער טייטש אנדערש ווערען

Teshuva doesn’t mean being better, teshuva means being different

(**(פחד יצחק** **ראש השנה מאמר כט,ט**

There is a minhag of darshonim to connect the end of the Torah to its beginning. And the medrash in our parsha does just that.

At the beginning of our parsha, Noach is described as an **איש צדיק** and ends the parsha as an **איש אדמה**. In contrast says the Medrash, Moshe Rabbeinu begins life as an **איש מצרי** and ends it as an **איש האלקים**.

But Noach was a farmer even before the mabul (flood)!? Indeed, Rashi tells us at the end of parshas Bereishis that Noach (which means “to ease”) was so called as a portend of a major future achievement. Noach would introduce industry changing innovations to the world of agriculture, making farming much easier.

So why was Noach described an  **איש צדיק**at the beginning of the parsha and only as an **איש אדמה** at the end?

The answer is that after the mabul, agriculture became the primary focus of Noach’s life; previously he was a tzaddik who happened to be involved in agriculture.

The lesson is clear. How do we define ourselves? What is our primary focus? Yona Hanovi’s response of עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי and the Medrash’s contrast of Noach and Moshe should guide us.

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