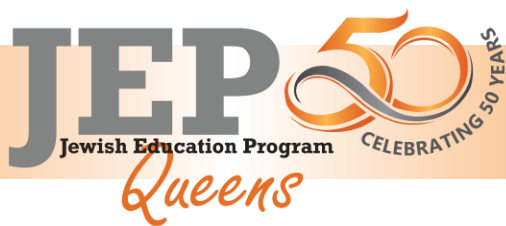


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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

LONG LIVE THE PHOENIX!

PARSHAS NOACH

I read a Torah-based story many years ago, but I don't remember all the details. Eliyahu HaNavi (or perhaps it was a Torah sage) approached two great rabbis. He said that if they would go with him right away, they would be able to bring Moshiach. One of the rabbis said that he had to leave but would return shortly. He wanted to tell his wife where he was going so that she wouldn't worry when he wouldn't come home on time. He quickly told his wife and returned. When he came back, he was told that it was too late; The moment in which they could have brought Moshiach, had already passed (Now, we are eagerly waiting for the day that Hashem brings Moshiach).

Should the rabbi have left immediately to bring Moshiach, even though his wife would have worried about his absence? I discussed this story with a rabbinical colleague and we both came to the same conclusion. Obviously, bringing Moshiach is very important. However, a mitzvah cannot be done in a way that ignores the sensitivities and hurts the feelings of others. It would not have been proper for the rabbi to make his wife worry, even though Moshiach's arrival was postponed.

Meir was learning in Israel for the year. He had two other roommates in his dormitory room. Meir wanted to get the special mitzvah of davening Shacharis at the earliest possible time, k'vasikin. Meir woke up extra early. He couldn't find his clothes in the dark, so he opened the light. The bright light woke up Meir's roommates, but he wasn't too concerned. He knew that they would fall back to sleep very quickly. And, after all, he needed the light to help him go to do a big mitzvah. Unfortunately, Meir did not realize that it is not appropriate to do a mitzvah in a way that causes harm to others.

The Mabul, the Great Flood, destroyed all of mankind, except for Noach and his family. After

*"The dove came back ...it had plucked an olive leaf with its bill."
(Beraishis 8:11)*

about a year in the Ark, the water receded. Noach wanted to check if the earth was dry enough to leave the Ark. First, he sent out a raven, who just kept circling around the Ark. A week later, Noach sent out a dove. There was still too much water covering the earth and the dove could not find a resting place,

so it returned to the Ark. Another week later, Noach again sent out the dove. This time the dove returned with an olive leaf that it had plucked. Clearly, the land was now visible.

The **Alter of Slobodka** zt"l (sefer Ohr Tzafon, vol 1 page 61) discusses the actions of the dove. The dove performed a great act of kindness for Noach. It brought the good news that the water had receded, and the earth was dry. Soon, Noach would be freed from his tiresome and burdensome job of taking care of all the animals in the Ark. The **Talmud** (Sanhedrin 108B) quotes Rav Hana bar Bizna who said that Shem told Avraham's servant, Eliezer, that they experienced great suffering in the Ark in caring for the animals. The **Talmud** continues Shem's narrative. Noach found the phoenix lying in its compartment in the Ark. He was wondering why the phoenix did not ask for food. The bird replied that it saw that Noach was very busy, and it did not want

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to trouble him by requesting food. Noah blessed the bird with long life.

Noach blessed the phoenix for its consideration. The **Alter** zt"l asks, shouldn't Noach have blessed the dove as well, for fulfilling its mission and bringing back such good news?

The **Midrash** (Beraishis Rabba 33) quotes the pasuk that the dove "*had plucked an olive leaf with its bill*". The **Midrash** translates the word "plucked" as "killed" (just as it means killed in the pasuk in Beraishis 37 when it says, "*tarof toraf Yosef*").

Noach told the dove that had it not plucked the branch, the branch would have grown into a tree. In the midst of the dove doing a good action, it did something that was inappropriate. Therefore, the dove did not deserve a blessing from Noach, perhaps losing the blessing of eternal life.

The dove fulfilled its mission. It acted with the best of intentions when it plucked an olive branch, proving to Noach that the flood waters had totally receded. However, there was a lacking in the dove's actions because it caused harm to something in the creation. It prevented one olive branch from growing further.

We can learn a lesson from this. Even when we are in the midst of doing a great mitzvah, we mustn't lessen it by harming something or someone else. It is more than an act of niceness on our part.

It is an obligation to avoid harming others!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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