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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

IT COSTS NOTHING YET IT IS SO VALUABLE!

PARSHAS NOACH

Rabbi Yisroel Alter, known as the Beis Yisroel, was the grandson of the **Sfas Emes**. There was a very great Sephardic rabbi who attributed his greatness to the encouragement of the Beis Yisroel. When this Sephardic rabbi was a young child, he was very poor. He had been orphaned by his father. On Yom Tov, all the boys in the neighborhood got new suits. This boy's mother could not afford a new suit, but she was able to buy him a new shirt. On Yom Tov he wore the shirt and was desperately hoping that someone would notice it and compliment him on it. No one noticed and this boy felt very sad. As he was standing on the street, the Beis Yisroel was walking in his direction, joined by a very large entourage. The young boy moved to the side to let the Beis Yisroel walk by. The Beis Yisroel stopped and noticed the boy's shirt. He picked up his own collar and looking at the boy said pshhh! The Beis Yisroel acknowledged the new shirt and gestured that it was very nice. That seemingly small gesture lifted the spirits of the young boy. Feeling good about himself, the young boy became a big rabbi. (Rabbi Yehuda Leib Wittler on Netzoir.org).

The parsha starts by praising Noach. "These are the generations of Noach. Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation. Noach walked with Hashem." (Bereishis 6:9). Later in the parsha, when Hashem told Noach to enter the ark, "Hashem told Noach, 'Come into the ark, you and your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me, in this generation.'" (Bereishis 6:9). **Rashi** (6:9) points out that when Hashem told Noach to enter the ark, Hashem left out a descriptive praise that the first pasuk of the parsha had used. The Torah left out the word of praise, "perfect", that the Torah had used at the beginning of the parsha. This is based on the **Talmud** (Eruvin 18B). Rabbi Yirmiya ben Elazar said that one should only say part of a person's praise in his presence. One may say all of a person's praise when not in his presence. When referring to Noach while not in his presence, Hashem, in the Torah, refers to Noah as a righteous and perfect man. In Noach's presence Hashem just referred to Noach as "righteous". **Rashi** (Eruvin 18B) explains that if you praise a

"Hashem said to Noach,
'Come into the ark, you and
your household, for I have seen
that you are righteous before
Me, in this generation.'"
(Bereishis 7:1)

person in totality in front of him it appears as if you are trying to flatter him.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand (Torah.org) points out something very interesting. Hashem could have

simply told Noach to come inside the ark. Hashem did not have to add the words of praise, "For you I have seen to be a righteous person before Me in this generation." We see that giving compliments is one of the Attributes of Hashem. This teaches us a very fundamental lesson. We, too, should give compliments to other people.

Everyone likes a compliment, no matter how successful and how important they are. A compliment makes a person feel good and gives him confidence.

In the times of the Beis HaMikdash, one who spoke loshon hara received the punishment of tzara'as and had to bring a korban, sacrifice, of atonement after he was healed (Vayikra 14:4-7). He brought two

birds to “kill off” the evil speech. Why were birds chosen for his atonement? **Rashi** explains that birds are a fitting symbol for someone who has spoken maliciously, because they, too, chirp and chatter incessantly. Their constant twittering mirrors the behavior that brought about the metzora’s affliction in the first place. They spoke too quickly and without sufficient thought. The **Sefas Emes** (5661), quoting the **Zohar**, says that the two birds represent the two types of human speech. One bird symbolizes the destructive potential of negative words, while the other represents the uplifting power of positive speech. The Sefas Emes suggests that when a person fills his speech with gossip, criticism, or sarcasm, he is not only causing damage. He is also squandering an extraordinary gift. Speech has the ability to destroy, but it also has the ability to build. A sincere compliment, a word of encouragement, or an expression of appreciation can make a difference in someone’s life. Some people are desperate to hear a good word. The metzora must learn to silence the destructive impulse that led him astray. The second bird is released to teach the metzora the importance of positive speech. Sometimes

refraining from saying a good word is as hurtful as saying a bad word. True purification is not achieved merely by eliminating negative speech. It requires learning how to use speech for good.

A spouse, a friend, a colleague, an employee, an employer, a parent, a sibling, and a rav can all benefit from hearing a compliment. It costs nothing to give, yet its effects can be tremendous!

Midrash Rabbah (Tehillim 5:7-8) says that Noach felt that he was as bad as the people in his generation. In fact, the **Talmud** (Sanhedrin 108A) says that Noach was also supposed to have perished in the Flood because of some personal shortcomings. However, Noach was spared through the kindness of Hashem because he found favor in Hashem’s eyes. According to the Midrash, Noach said, “Because You told me that You have found me to be righteous in this generation, I was motivated to be righteous.” “What made me change,” says Noach, “is that You, Hashem, complimented me. That gave Noach confidence in himself and the courage to improve. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

It seems that Hashem’s compliment to Noach led to Noach’s salvation!

Each of us should freely give compliments to other people.
We will be copying the attributes of Hashem.
It does not cost us anything.
In doing so, we can boost another person’s confidence
as well as help change another person’s life!

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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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