



REBBETZIN SHIRA

SMILES

Faculty, OU Israel Center

Vineyard's Vision

“*Vayachel* Noach ish ha’adamah vayita kerem – and Noach, a man of the earth, began, and he planted a vineyard.” (*Bereisheet* 9:20) This verse sets the trajectory for Noach and his family in the aftermath of the Great Flood with devastating results. “*Vayachel* – and he began.” As Noach sets out to rebuild the world, the Torah directs us with this one word as we try to understand where Noach went wrong. Rashi notes that the word ‘*vayachel*’ also connotes “*chulin*” – that which is profane. In choosing to plant a vineyard, Noach ends up drunk and disgraced, everything the opposite of holiness and sacred. There are powerful lessons that we can learn from this incident and apply to our own experiences as we make our own choices to live higher.

Just as reentering the earth’s atmosphere

is one of the most tenuous moments in a space shuttle’s flight, Rav Wolbe cautions us to act carefully after undergoing a significant spiritual elevation. If one follows such an experience with any activity that is not on par with this newly acquired spiritual level, he has indeed caused himself to be profane, leaving a void in his spiritual achievement. Noach had just spent an entire year dedicating himself continuously to the well-being of the animals in the ark and ensuring the continuity of the world. His very first act should have been something that reflected this intense devotion to others as opposed to doing something that suggested personal indulgence, i.e., planting a vineyard to make wine. We can keep this in mind at the uplifting times in our lives, be it a special Shabbat or chag, and think about what we can do in the following days to maintain the spiritual exhilaration we found.

Rav Milevsky in *Ner Uziel* describes Noach as standing at an existential crossroads when he disembarked from the ark. Noach

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sees before him a destroyed world. What will he choose? He could express gratitude that he was saved from such wreckage and ruin and dedicate himself even more fully to the service of Hashem. Or, he could lose faith in Man's higher morality and plunge himself into pure physicality; unfortunately, Noah chooses the latter. Often, when faced with difficult life choices, we find ourselves at a similar crossroads. Human nature may push us to take the easier, more convenient path, but we know that our superior selves can do better and choose the more deeply gratifying, ultimate Truth.

At this juncture, the Torah refers to Noah as an *"ish ha'adamah* - a man of the earth". Rav Chasman in *Ohr Yahel* explains that by making a decision that was based on his lower earthly desires, Noah identified with his earthiness and not his higher spiritual capacity. He thus plummeted from being called a *'tzadik* in the beginning of the *parashah* to deserving this simple, base designation. With one decision, what to plant first, he spirals completely out of control. Chazal tell us that one can acquire his world with one turn, one moment spent making the right choice. We too, may experience such 'one-time' decisions. Take that moment to consider the consequences and ramifications and choose the appropriate course.

Letitcha Elyon points our attention to the language of the *Mesilat Yesharim*. One must know *"mah chovato b'olamo"* - what is each person's obligation in his world. Each person is a mini world wherein we each must make decisions that are in sync with Hashem's expectations. May we choose appropriately in our continued service to make this world a repository for the Shechinah. ■

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