



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Noach 5769

פרשת נח תשס"ט

## THE PARTY'S OVER

Many people are familiar with the oft-quoted statement of R' Tarphon (*Avos 2:15*):

רבי טרפון אומר, היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה...  
"R' Tarphon says: The day is short, but the workload is great..."

What may come as somewhat of a surprise to some people is that this was not always the case. In fact, as we shall soon see, for a good chunk of history, the exact opposite was true.

## THE EASY LIFE

When perusing the latter sections of parshas Bereishis and parshas Noach, we encounter a particular phenomenon that often leaves us feeling somewhat wistful for years past. These sections chronicle the genealogy of the descendants of Adam Harishon, listing their names and their life spans. One cannot help but be awestruck by the remarkable length of their years. Whether it be the 969 years of Mesushelach, or the 600 years of Noach's son Shem, the average lifespan seemed to be astronomically long.

Around the time of Avraham Avinu, however, things seemed to change. There were those who did live much longer than we do today, but nowhere near the huge lifespans of the previous generations. What happened? To what can the change be attributed?

The Ramchal (*Adir Bamarom*) explains that the reduction in life expectancy was not the only change; rather, it was symptomatic of a much greater, overall shift, wherein the whole world order was entirely altered. (This is not to suggest, Heaven forbid, that a mistake was made at the

beginning of Creation. Rather, as we shall see, it was man who basically messed things up for himself.)

As previously stated, things ran differently from the beginning of time. Instead of "a short day with a large task," it was "a long day with a small task." To properly serve Hashem and fulfill His will, people didn't really have to work too hard. Hashem gave forth an abundant supply of *shefa* (spiritual emanations) and *siyata dishmaya* (Divine assistance) to aid people in performing His service. Although it is really beyond our comprehension to grasp the exact nature of this esoteric concept, the basic idea is this: for all intents and purposes, heeding the command of Hashem required little or no effort. All one really had to do was lean back and let himself be guided by Hashem's Helping Hand.

A manifestation of this seemingly blissful type of existence was the phenomenally long lives that people led. Things came easily, there was plenty of time, and very little effort was needed to do the task of fulfilling Hashem's Will: "a long day and a small job."

## NEW ERA

But as happens so often – people blew it. Even with this incredibly simplified arrangement, people still did not live up to the task. They resisted Hashem's call and instead pursued evil. Noach was the only exception, which is why, ultimately, it was he alone who was permitted to survive.

Having proven themselves unworthy, mankind forfeited this incredibly privileged existence. Hashem charged that from now on, things would proceed much differently; a new form of Divine

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Service, amongst a new set of circumstances. No longer would the “day be long, and the workload small,” but rather, the “day” would be much shorter, and the workload substantial. Gone was the easy life, the effortless climb to spiritual grandeur. From here on in, one would need to truly *earn* greatness and life in the Hereafter. Life in this world would be shorter, but the task was still large. In order to complete his part, a person would now have to toil and sweat.

The first to really take up the challenge – and excel to the fullest – was Avraham Avinu. He was charged with a “large task”: namely, the pursuit and fulfillment of the *mitzvos* of the Torah. Of course, as we know, the Torah preceded Creation (*Pesachim 54a*). It was Avraham Avinu who was the first to actively fulfill the entire Torah. And this tremendous undertaking was passed on to his offspring.

This huge difference in the nature of life and *avodas Hashem* is actually hinted at by Rashi (*Bereishis 6:9*). Comparing Noach with Avraham, Rashi states: “Noach required assistance and support, while Avraham attained righteousness of his own accord.” As a member of the previous generations, Noach lived during the era of the “long day,” when things came easily and those desiring righteousness needed only to allow themselves to be guided on the proper path. Avraham, on the other hand, was part of the new world order; as such, his righteousness needed to be – and was – self-made.

### WELL WORTH THE EFFORT

It is true that being a true *eved Hashem* (servant of Hashem) does require us to *shvitz* a bit. One may have to summon super-human *kochos* (strength) just to get up in the morning to *daven*! However, the “short day and long task” situation should not be a cause for disappointment. The benefits to this approach are indeed significant.

Firstly, there is the reward factor. The greater effort that is required means that an even greater reward awaits us, as the Mishnah states elsewhere in *Avos (5:23)*, “The reward is commensurate to the toil.” R’ Tarphon himself seems to indicate as much at the conclusion of his statement: “The day is short, the work is great... and the reward is tremendous.”

Perhaps more importantly, however, is the immense, inherent greatness an individual can attain through this kind of *avodas Hashem*. By adopting this approach, Avraham made it possible for his offspring to attain such elevated levels of spiritual grandeur, well beyond the reach and imaginations of the early generations.

And if we keep it up, we will hopefully soon merit to enter into the future era. Then – as we recite in the *bentching* on the Seder nights – “the ‘day’ will be filled with only good and will last forever... May we merit a portion with the righteous of that era!”

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