

I

Charles Duhigg's 2012 work, *The Power of Habit*, has a chapter dedicated to the skills and confidence Starbucks instills in each of its nearly 200,000 employees around the world. [I know you're thinking to yourself, "I can't believe he's talking about Starbucks *again*," but I promise I'm going somewhere with this.] In the chapter Duhigg interviews a manager of two California stores named Travis Leach who started working for Starbucks at age 19, and it has in many ways saved his life.

Leach grew up under difficult circumstances. His parents were both drug addicts in a low-income neighborhood and the environment he was raised in never fostered the skills he would need to achieve interpersonal success. Travis was aggressive, impatient and incapable of expressing himself strategically. He bounced from one job to the next, sometimes he quit other times he was fired, all before a friend recommended Starbucks. There he found a job, a health plan, a 401k, but more so, he discovered the employee training focused on willpower and self-discipline, that he should have, but never received at home.

Despite it all, Travis loved his parents, and they loved him too. He spoke to Duhigg about his parents' death. His mother died of an infection, probably related to her heroin use, and a few weeks later he got a call that his father had been admitted to the hospital with pneumonia. He rushed to the hospital to be with his dad, but he arrived at 8:02PM. The nurse told him that visitors were not allowed after 8:00. He left, and went home, and his father died that night.

Travis told Duhigg how this all happened before Starbucks.

“If Dad had died a year later, everything would have been different. By then I would have known how to calmly plead with the nurse. I would have acknowledged her authority and asked politely for a small exception. I could have gotten inside the hospital, but instead, I gave up and walked away.”

He never say his dad again.

On the anniversary of his father’s death each year, Travis does not mourn, he does not travel to the cemetery where his dad is buried; he wakes up early, takes a shower, plans out his day in careful detail, and drives to work. Says Duhigg: “Travis always arrives on time.”

II

Why did Noach get drunk? There are many answer to this question. One possibility is that the entire incident was a mistake. We have no precedent for drunkenness in the Torah thus far; maybe Noach just got carried away...

In his autobiography, Chief Rabbi Lau shares a story of a hospital visit he made with his father-in-law, to meet an elderly Yiddish poet named Itzik Manger. The room was dark and filled with smoke and you could tell from speaking to the old man that he had had a bit too much to drink. Manger could tell the two visitors were surprised with his condition so he shared with them his thoughts about Noach.

“How can a *tsaddik* be a drunk? I always wondered about this, but now I’ve reached an age and a condition to understand Noach... When he went home and began to look for his *shtetl* – he found nothing. He wanted to visit his neighborhood *shteibel*, his study hall, his synagogue, but found not a trace. Where was

the grocery store? Where was the postman and the wagon driver he once knew? No one was left. And so he, to forget his solitude, he drank...”

‘I am Noach’ after the flood, said Manger from his hospital bed... He listed the names of the communities, the Yeshivas and the Rabbis he once knew. ‘So you will excuse me Rabbi Frankel’ he said, if sometimes in order to forget the horrors, I drink a little....”

Rabbi Lau explained that when Manger came to Israel after the war he came alone. A few people appreciated his talents but with time, his fame subsided. This was the fate of the poet and Yiddish in general. Said Rabbi Lau: “I cannot judge him for his statement or criticize him for his choices.”

III

This morning, I’d like to offer a third explanation of Noach’s behavior that resolves a peculiar timeline in the pesukim of Perek 8. If Izchak Manger is correct, one might expect Noach to come off the Teiva a drunk. To leave depressed and downtrodden. But the story in the Chumash is a bit more complex. When Noach first leaves the Teiva, he brings Korbanot, Hashem blesses him, and despite all the destruction he receives an amazing promise from G-d that the world will never know such atrocities, ever again. I would understand if Noach emerged defeated, but after all of Perek 8, we would think he would be more confident, more positive, better prepared for the future. It is only *after* it all, the promises, the blessings, the rainbow, that Noach starts to drink. Why?

Rabbi Kenneth Hain, suggested the following magnificent answer. Before Noach prepares to leave the Teivah, he waits for a divine command.

טו. וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ לֵאמֹר: טז. צֵא מִן־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֵיךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ:
And yet, when they actually leave, the order is different.

יח. וַיֵּצְאוּ־נֹחַ וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בְנָיו אִתּוֹ:

If Hashem instructs them to leave as couples, why does the Torah tell us each gender left alone? [Was this just orthodoxy moving to the right?] Rashi explains:

שהיה נח דואג לעסוק בפרייה ורבייה עד שהבטיחו הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא לשחת את העולם עוד, וכן עשה. ובאחרונה אמר לו הנני מסכים לעשות קיום וחזוק ברית להבטחתי, ואתן לך אות:

Chazzal say, and justifiably so, after witnessing the world completely undone, the survivors had no interest in rebuilding. “Why should we populate a world that can be so easily washed away?” Precisely because they separated Hashem appears. He commands them in the mitzvah of *peruh u’revu* and they refuse. When Noach says he won’t move on under such uncertain conditions, Hashem agrees to covenant, to a rainbow that symbolizes his reassurance and only then does Noach drink.

Something clicks in Noach’s head. He doesn’t hide behind alcohol because the world was destroyed (he understood the reason for it) but after Perek 8 he realizes that just as he negotiated for his secure future, he could have negotiated in the past. Noach realizes that he spent 100 years building a Teivah and none of it asking Hashem to reconsider. He now looks back at his self-centeredness, at his lack of confidence and compassion for others and realizes he could have saved an entire world.

IV

We possess a lot of skills and talents, the kind of abilities that can make a real difference. But like Travis Leach, if your potential to communicate is untapped, like Noach, if the instinct to stick up for what

you know is right, has yet to emerge, precious opportunities fall by the wayside. I often feel like there are things I should have said, or things I could have done, but didn't. I thought it would have been awkward to offer my help, I didn't want to be too pushy, or look too frum, so I said nothing. But I should have done something and I regret it.

Noach's alcoholism, his post-traumatic stress, doesn't stem from his loss or his isolation but his overwhelming sense of regret. And as we transition from Noach to Avraham, from the hesitant *tsaddik* to the *zariz* whose confidence led him to found an entire theology and a people, we too should be reminded to take action. To worry less about what might happen if we do something that fails, and focus on celebrating our willingness to try, regardless of the outcome. What would have been, if Noach had fought for the world? We'll never know if he could have won that argument, the only thing we know, is that he didn't even try.

בראשית פרשת נח פרק ה. פרק ט,

- (טו) וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ לֵאמֹר:
(טז) זֶא מִן־הַתְּבֵה אַתָּה וְאַשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֵיךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ:
(יז) וַיֵּצְאוּ־נֹחַ וּבְנָיו וְנָשֵׁי־בְנָיו אִתּוֹ:
(א) וַיְבָרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת־בְּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:
(ב) וְאֲנִי הֲנִי מְקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־וַיְרַעְכֶם אֶתְרִיכֶם:
(ג) וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בְּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל לְשַׁחַת כָּל־בְּשָׂר:
(ד) שְׁלֹשָׁה אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וּמֵאלֶּה נִפְצָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:
(ה) וַיִּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כָּרְם:
(ו) וַיִּשְׁתֶּה מִיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אֶהְלֶה:

רש"י בראשית פרשת נח פרק ט

- (ט) ואני הנני - מסכים אני עמך, שהיה נח דואג לעסוק בפריה ורביה עד שהבטיחו הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא לשחת את העולם עוד, וכן עשה. ובאחרונהפ אמר לו הנני מסכים לעשות קיום וחזוק ברית להבטחתי, ואתן לך אות: