

An MP is a member of the British Parliament
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Menachem Persoff

Righteous Talk

Parshat No'ach teaches us much about what we do with one of our most vital attributes: the ability to speak and address others and talk about them.

But first, let us consider Rashi's well-known comments on the opening line of the Parsha that talks of No'ach as "a righteous person, perfect in his generation", which can be understood in one of two ways. (1) No'ach was righteous and, moreover, he walked with God or (2) In his generation, he was righteous, but compared with Avraham Avinu, who walked before God, No'ach would be considered "worthless".

Rashi is perhaps warning us that, to coin a phrase, 'comparisons are odious'. After all, the laws of Lashon Hara strengthen that notion - for even if one talks well of someone, there will always be somebody to undermine the compliment and speak in derogatory terms about that same person.

Later in the Torah narrative, Hashem turns to No'ach, saying: "Come to the Ark... for it is you whom I have seen to

be righteous before me in this generation." Rashi again comments: 'Hashem did not invoke the previous accolade accorded to No'ach, namely, that he was both "righteous and perfect" - but only used the term "Tzaddik".'

Rashi proposes that from this shortened description of No'ach when Hashem approached him directly, we learn to bestow but "half" of one's praises when addressing frontally those we wish to compliment. Surely, the rationale is not to overly praise individuals lest their pride gets the better of them.

Furthermore, when Hashem instructs No'ach to bring the animals into the Ark, He distinguishes between "every clean animal" [those later permitted to be eaten] and those "not clean". Rather than employing terms such as 'impure' or 'foul', Hashem softens the language, as it were - to teach us, no doubt, to use clean language in our daily speech.

Perhaps Hashem is also teaching us - to coin another phrase - to be as careful about what comes out of our mouths as what enters them. **MP**