



INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
CONTINUITY

Noach: Stop Circling

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

*“And he sent forth the raven, and it went out, back and forth until the waters dried up off the earth”
(Genesis 8:7)*

The floodwaters had receded, and Noach sent the raven to seek dry land. The raven circled the ark but came back. The story seems simple enough – no dry land to be found, no journey to embark upon, come back to the ark. Yet, Rashi shares a fascinating comment:

The simple explanation is its apparent meaning, but the Midrash Aggadah (Gen. Rabbah 33:5) [explains that] the raven was destined for another errand (shlichus) during the lack of rain in the time of Elijah, as it is said (I Kings 17:6): “and the ravens brought him bread and meat.”

This wasn't the destined mission for the raven. The raven had another *shlichus* (agency/mission) to bring bread to *Eliyahu HaNavi* when he was hiding from King Achav (a story for another time). Rashi is teaching us an all-important lesson – everyone and everything has a mission and purpose in this world. Rashi's words are reminiscent of the Mishna in Pirkei Avos, Ethics of Our Fathers:

He (Ben Azzai) used to say: do not despise any man, and do not discriminate against anything, for there is no man that has not his hour, and there is no thing that has not its place (4:3).

The raven had a different mission, and therefore, was unable to fulfill the one Noach assigned to it. What is true for the raven is even truer for us. We each have a mission. We each have a purpose. At times, the mission may align with my skill set and be easy to execute. However, at times, the mission I am called upon to fulfill is difficult and arduous. The Torah is filled with stories of great men and women who had to undergo challenges and adversity to fulfill their *shlichus* (mission). But unlike the raven who had but one mission, man can have multiple missions over the course of life. Different stages and seasons come with their own mission and mandate. Yet, as different as we are from the raven, often we behave in the same fashion. We too tend to circle the ark of existence. Too often, we are afraid to embrace our *shlichus*, we are frightened to venture into the unknown even though it promises so much success and fulfillment. Instead, we choose to remain close to the ark of the known. We prefer to play it safe and settle and hover in familiar territory. It is scary to venture out into the unknown. But my mission can never be found in the comfort of what is known. It requires me to take flight, it requires to at least step foot into the unknown, it requires me to take chances. Hovering around the ark works for the raven; it can't work for us.

The new year is upon us. The coming months are filled with promise and potential. It is now that we each must try to figure out what our *shlichus* is. It could be identifying my mission for today or defining my mission for life. We must give significant thought as to why we have been placed on this earth and what Hashem wants from us. We must resist the temptation to be a raven and just hover in comfort. We must take flight and find the courage to embrace the mission.