



Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

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Parashat Noach: The Mitzvah of "Be Fruitful and Multiply"

In last week's Parashah – Parashat Bereshit – Hashem commands Adam: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Bereshit 1:28). This Mitzvah appears again in our Parashah: "And G-d blessed Noach and his sons, and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Bereshit 9:1). Our Rabbis in Gemara Yevamot (65b) say that women are exempt from the Mitzvah of "Be Fruitful and Multiply". Yet how can a man have children alone? Nonetheless, this Mitzvah was given only to men and not to women. Why?

Rabbi Meir Simchah of Dvinsk explains in the Mesech Chochma (Bereshit 9:7) that women are not obligated in this Mitzvah because pregnancy is sometimes quite difficult, childbirth is difficult, and taking care of a baby is

difficult, and the Torah does not force someone to do something which may be beyond his ability.

But if Hashem does not command women to have children, how will children come into the world? Through the desire for children that Hashem planted within women, as we see with Rachel: "Give me children or I will die" (Bereshit 30a). A woman has children because of her desire to do so. There is a balance between the desire and the difficulties, and a woman navigates between them.

Therefore, when people asked Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah the halachic question: "How many children is one obligated to have after the basic obligation of having a boy and a girl?", he provided the guiding principle: have the most children possible based on one's ability – one's physical ability, one's emotion ability, and one's financial ability.



Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528
www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

