

"And Noach bore three sons: Shem, Cham and Yefes." (Bereshis 6:10) The Gemara (Sanhedrin 69b) asks why Noach's sons are listed in this order, as we know from elsewhere that Shem was the youngest of his brothers. The Gemara answers that the Torah lists Noach's sons in the order of their wisdom ("derech chochmoson"), and Shem is thus understandably enumerated first (as he was the forerunner for our Avos and the teachings of Torah).

Tosafos (ibid. s.v. "Ella") comments that the Gemara's explanation leaves a question unanswered, for if order of wisdom is applied by the pasuk, why is Yefes listed last, rather than Cham? Yefes, whose name means "Beauty", represents culture and secular knowledge, and he was the predecessor of ancient Greece; therefore, Yefes should seemingly precede Cham, who embodies the animalistic side of Man, embodying unbridled passion and base hedonism. Why, then, is Cham listed before Yefes?

In order to answer Tosafos' question, one may suggest that the Gemara's definition of wisdom ("chochmoh") as applied to the listing of Noach's sons is not knowledge of information or skills, or cultural development. Rather, chochmoh refers to knowledge of absolute truth - knowledge of Hashem.¹ Although Yefes was the embodiment of secular intelligence and advanced culture, his failure to recognize Hashem places him **below** Cham. Yefes - who fails to see Hashem's Hand in his study and mastery of the sciences, the beauty of the universe, and the incredibly intricate and advanced natural structures and systems which were all put in place to function in tandem - is on a lower level than Cham, who simply lacks a heightened capacity to derive Hashem's existence and works based on his intellect. Yefes can thus be placed beneath Cham, as the lack of true chochmoh exhibited by Yefes exceeds Cham's shortcomings in perceiving the Divine.

We are in a position to perceive Hashem from the study of Torah as well as from concentrating on the universe. When we think of the purpose and clear planning behind every natural structure and organism, with all of its subparts and their innerworkings and functions, we should be spellbound, for humans cannot duplicate such objects and systems. These facets of nature point to an unmistakable Creator Who established them with utmost precision and intent. The more we think about how and why each living being operates as it does and possesses the natural features with which it was endowed, and how the mind and senses function, and how molecular systems are structured and relate, the more our emunah and discernment of the Hand of Hashem should flourish. Yefes, however, represents a lack of objectivity and true appreciation and apprehension regarding the wonders of the universe, and his thirst for knowledge is misdirected and misused.

¹ This fits in with the Gemara's earlier example (ibid.) of listing people in the order of their wisdom, in which it is proffered that Avrohom Avinu is listed with his brothers in such order. Again, we know nothing about the level of knowledge of worldly information or skills attained by Avrohom Avinu or his brothers. Thus, it may very well be the knowledge of Hashem which is intended.

May we follow the path of Shem, and may we utilize Yefes' knowledge according to the beracha given to Noach, that such wisdom be contained within/bounded by the tents of Shem (Bereshis 9:27), so that we utilize it with the proper perspective and with the correct goals.