



After Noach and his family emerge from the ark to begin rebuilding the earth after the deluge, God appears to Noach and issues a number of instructions, including the famous command, "*Ve-atem peru u-revu*" ("And so be fruitful and increase" – 9:7). Maimonides, in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*asei* 212), cites this verse as the Biblical source for the *mitzva* of procreation.

In defining this *mitzva*, Maimonides adds a phrase that caught the attention of numerous later scholars. He writes, "He commanded us to be fertile and increase and *intend for the purpose of sustaining the species.*" Seemingly, Maimonides includes the required intention as part of the definition of the *mitzva*, something that he does not do with regard to any other of the Torah's commandments. When it comes to other *mitzvot*, we find a famous debate in the Talmud and among the halakhic authorities as to whether intention for the sake of the *mitzva* is a necessary prerequisite for the proper fulfillment of the *mitzva*. The Talmud addresses, for example, cases of one who sounds the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah for musical enjoyment, or if one reads the section of *shema* from the Torah for the purpose of checking the writing in the scroll, rather than for the sake of fulfilling the *mitzva*. From Maimonides' formulation of *peru u-revu* (procreation), however, it appears that proper intention – "for the purpose of sustaining the species" – is required as part of the *mitzva* itself. Even if we accept the position that intention for the *mitzva* is generally not required for the fulfillment of that *mitzva*, one fulfills the obligation of *peru u-revu* only if he has this intention, which is included as part of the *mitzva*'s very definition.

Several approaches have been taken among the scholars to explain Maimonides' position. Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov (author of the famous work *Benei Yissaskhar*, 1783-1841), in his work *Derekh Pikudekha*, suggests that Maimonides reached this conclusion on the basis of the Torah's presentation of the *mitzva*. God here says to Noach, "And now, be fruitful and increase; abound on the earth and multiply upon it." Following the actual imperative – "be fruitful and increase" – the Torah specifies the desired purpose of this obligation: "abound on the earth and multiply upon it." Since the Torah makes specific mention of the purpose underlying this *mitzva*, it stands to reason that the *mitzva* must be performed with this purpose in mind. Maimonides thus concluded that a person must beget children with the specific intention of seeing to it that mankind will "abound on the earth and multiply upon it."

Rabbi Meir Dan Platsky (early 20th century), in his work *Chemdat Yisrael*, suggests a different explanation. He claims that Maimonides here implicitly addresses the question of how the Torah could issue a command whose fulfillment is beyond the individual's power. The miracle of conception and childbirth is under God's control; no person can be guaranteed to succeed in his efforts to beget children. Maimonides therefore clarified that this *mitzva* requires that one "intend for the purpose of sustaining the species." Meaning, the Torah enjoins the person to work towards this goal; whether or not he succeeds, of course, lies in God's hands. According to this reading, Maimonides here does not impose a requirement that one beget children with the specific intention of "sustaining the species." Rather, he defines the obligation in terms of the required effort, rather than yielding the results, given that the results are beyond human control.

Finally, Rabbi Menachem Kasher (20th century), in his work *Torah Sheleima* (Bereishit, chapter 9, note 64), suggests that Maimonides requires this intention because man is in any event instinctively drawn towards procreation. God created the human being with a natural desire to mate and beget children, and thus if He issued a command of procreation, it must entail more than procreation itself. Maimonides thus concluded that fulfilling this *mitzva* requires not merely reproducing, but also doing so with the sincere intention to fulfill God's command to Noach, that his descendants "abound on the earth and multiply upon it."