

"Noach was a man, righteous and wholehearted". (6:9)

The characterization of Noach as a *tzaddik*, a devout and righteous man, is enigmatic. Indeed, *Chazal* themselves question Noach's unique personality. He was, however, the only individual who Hashem saved from the devastation that engulfed an entire world. Corruption, violence, and debauchery effected a tragic end to that world. One man stood alone with his family, in contrast to these people, unaffected by their immoral way of life. Hashem told him to build an ark in order to save himself and to go forward to rebuild the world.

"vzv rusc hbpk ehsm h,htl l,ut hf"- *For you I have seen righteous before Me in this generation.* In no other place in the *Torah* does Hashem describe a man as a *tzaddik*. Nonetheless, *Chazal* state that Noach's faith was equivocal. *"He lacked faith, for had the water not reached his ankles he would not have entered the ark."* Indeed, the angels demanded that he perish with the rest of his generation.

This unique phenomenon, in which *Chazal* question one whose character Hashem has praised, prompts the obvious question, "What was wrong with Noach? Where did his weakness lie? And wherein did he fail?" *Horav Moshe Swift, z.l.*, suggests that the answer lies in the contrast between Noach and two other great leaders, Avraham and Moshe. For days, Avraham *Avinu* stood entreating Hashem on behalf of the evil inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He threw himself into war in order to save his nephew, Lot. Moshe *Rabbeinu* similarly devoted his life to *Klal Yisrael*. On the other hand, Noach spent 120 years building an ark and preparing the equipment, but he did not influence the moral development of a single person in his generation. Noach was not able to retrieve even one individual from devastation. Consistent with this concept, the *Zohar* states *"Since Noach did not pray for the people, the flood of destruction was therefore named after him."* As Yeshayohu *Hanavi* says "hk ,tz jb hn hf/" We associate Noach with a world that was destroyed, rather than with the new world which he eventually built.

One may succeed in amassing a great fortune, but if the world does not benefit from his wealth, what good has it brought him? One can be the greatest physician, but if he does not expend his talents by treating the sick, his skill is useless to society. A *tzaddik's* presence offers great merit for his generation, but if he does not influence his peers to correct their ways, he remains as "hbpk ehsm"- as the *Torah* says about Noach, a "hbpk ehsm"- a *tzaddik* before Me, but not to mankind.

The lesson to be derived from Noach's tragic yet glorious life is that one cannot build a Jewish homelife only for oneself. We must endeavor to exercise our influence on our family and on the society within which we live. Noach's glorious life went from the high of aht ehsm to the low of vnst aht, the heavenly man to the earthly man. His own child Cham, who had witnessed such devout piety as a child, was driven to such an act of indecency, as recorded in the *Talmud*. How tragic it is for the old father whose life comes to an end with the words "igbf rurt"- *"cursed be Canaan"*, cursing the child whom he saved from the flood. How many people have tragically passed on cursing the day that shame was brought upon them by their own descendants? The challenging

question stands accusing us all; are we building an ark only for ourselves, or for others, too? We must exert our influence upon those around us, so that we do not remain alive just to Hashem while being dead to the world around us.