

“Go forth from the Ark: you and your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives with you.” (8:16)

Noach had been living in a sealed ark, together with thousands of animals for over a year. One would think that when the first opportunity to leave would present itself, he would run as fast as he could. Apparently, this is not what happened. After being in the Ark, slaving all day and night ceaselessly for a year, Noach was not ready to leave. It required Hashem’s command to enable Noach to set foot outside of the Ark. Why? It is not as if he were living comfortably amid luxury. What was holding him back? Perhaps he did not know that the ground was dry! When he pulled off the cover of the Ark, he saw that it was dry outside. In any event, all Hashem had to do was to inform Noach that all was well; the Flood was over; the ground was dry. Why did he require a command in order to leave?

Horav Ben Tzion Firer, zl, responds with a powerful insight. Noach survived, while everyone else in the world perished. The world as he knew it was one large graveyard, with millions of bodies strewn throughout. These were his compatriots, people whom he knew, whom he had seen. He was alive – they were not. This could have catalyzed an overpowering emotion with which Noach had to grapple. Furthermore, to have survived when everyone else died, can leave one with an overwhelming sense of guilt. It is so much easier to hide, to shelter oneself from reality, and not have to confront a destroyed world devoid of life.

Noach knew that he was not guilty of their deaths. He had tried to tell people that a flood was coming, but they did not listen. Furthermore, his survival was not linked to their deaths. He did not live because they died. Nonetheless, he did not feel good about his survival, when he was the only one to have survived. The emotional turmoil within him was palpable. Was it any different in 1945 when pockets of survivors from the Nazi Holocaust looked around the death camps, and saw bodies of their friends strewn about, death everywhere? One was almost ashamed to have survived when others were not as fortunate. Noach went through the motions of sending out the raven and the dove to ascertain that the Flood was over and the ground was dry, but he was personally not ready to leave. Only after Hashem commanded him to leave the Ark did Noach leave the “comfort” of his past year’s “home.”

Perhaps another emotion enveloped Noach, limiting his ability to leave the protected shelter of the Ark. He might have been submerged in a feeling of hopelessness. The entire world had been destroyed. No one, except literally a handful of human beings, was left. The world that had been was no more. He did not want to go on. Indeed, Hashem commanded him to be fruitful and multiply – propagate the world once again. Why did Noach need a reminder from Hashem? Had not Hashem given Adam *HaRishon* a long-standing command to procreate? Noach was concerned that another flood or some other punishment would once again wipe out the world. He needed assurances. Noach was a troubled man. Whatever the reason-- survivor guilt, survivor shame, survivor despair-- Noach was a survivor and he required special treatment.

There is one more major reason that Noach might have hesitated. In an earlier *Peninim*, I quoted an inspirational insight from **Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita**, which I feel is appropriate to reiterate. Shortly after the tragic, untimely deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the two older sons of Aharon *HaKohen*, the Torah writes: "Moshe spoke to Aharon and to Elazar and Isamar, his remaining sons" (*Vayikra* 10:12). The words "*Banav ha'nosarim*", remaining sons, seem superfluous. Obviously, if Aharon had four sons, of which two had died, the two who remained were the surviving two sons. Why is their survival underscored?

The *Mashgiach* explains that Moshe wanted to emphasize the fact that they were survivors. They were no ordinary people. Having survived a trauma which took the lives of their brothers means that they now had the obligation to carry on. They had an added responsibility: theirs and their brothers'. Indeed, as the *Mashgiach* points out, we are a nation of survivors, having seen six million of our brothers and sisters brutally wiped out in the Holocaust. We have a dual responsibility which weighs heavy upon our shoulders.

Perhaps Noach could not handle the added burden. The world had perished. He alone had to carry on for them. This, he felt, was simply too much, too difficult a role for him to bear. Hashem told him, "Noach, you must go out, pick up the pieces and rebuild the world. This is what survivors do. Veritably, it is done with great sadness and extreme difficulty, but it must be done. This is why you were saved."

Following World War II, there were survivors, both in America and *Eretz Yisrael*, who reestablished Torah and laid the foundation for thriving Torah communities. It was not easy for them. Many had lost their entire families, friends, *yeshivos*; everything was destroyed in the flames of the Holocaust. They could have easily locked themselves in their homes and be consumed by remorse. The list of survivors who achieved the elite status of builders of Torah is not large. It is comprised of indefatigable warriors who fought for Torah because it was who they were and was all they had left. Many of them had lost families and institutions that had constituted their life's work. Yet, they persevered and rebuilt, taking all of us with them.

The one person who stands out as the primary architect of Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*, the individual who taught others the meaning of building for Torah, was the *Ponovezer Rav*, **Horav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, zl**. *Horav Shlomo Lorencz, zl*, once asked him how a person in his position-- having lost all of his family, his community and his Torah institutions-- could evince such an extraordinary degree of ingenuity and creativity, to an extent that he overshadowed men much younger and healthier than himself. From where did he derive his energy and enthusiasm?

"Your question is a valid one," he began. "The truth is, I am engulfed by dejection and despair, yet this is precisely why I am involved in building... In my situation, there are just two options: either I roam around and break windows; or I build and build without stopping!"

The *Ponovezer Rav* found that working to reestablish Europe's devastated *yeshivos* calmed his

tormented spirit after the losses he had sustained. He did not permit the emptiness within him to fester and lead him deeper into despair. Rather, he harnessed his pain and employed it as a vehicle for unparalleled creativity.

In his *hesped*, eulogy, for the *Ponovezer Rav*, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, **Horav Shmuel Rosovsky, zl**, offered a similar idea that further illuminates the *Rav's* remarks. *Rav* Shmuel related that he had once asked the *Rav* how he maintained such extreme focus on constant achievement without allowing for a moment's rest or relaxation. The *Rav* told *Rav* Shmuel that essentially he considered himself to have been incinerated together with the six million *kedoshim*, martyrs, of the Holocaust: "If despite that, there is still life within me, it is only for the purpose of rebuilding and restoring the glory of our People." It was with this thought constantly in mind that he never wavered, never slowed down, until he breathed his last breath. It is what motivated him and imbued him with the energy to continue his noble and holy work on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*.