

Come to the Ark, you and all your household. (7:1)

A *teivah* is an Ark, a container, a box which holds an object within its confines. *Teivah* is also a word. The *Chassidic* Masters, notably the *Baal Shem Tov*, *zl*, render Hashem's command to Noach to "Come into the *Teivah*" homiletically. Hashem is also saying: "Enter into the words of prayer and Torah study; there you will find a sanctuary of wisdom, meaning and holiness amidst the raging flood waters of life."

The various commentators expound on this play-on-word translation. Perhaps we can focus on the meaning of *teivah*/word as the reason for the disaster that befell that generation, and then attempt to suggest how the *teivah* was an opportunity for penance. People communicate largely by word of mouth. They speak to one another. What they say and how they express themselves distinguishes between a good word, a kind word, a complimentary word, a bad word, a slanderous word. We all have an idea of the value and significance of the correct word, well-placed and expressed with care and sensitivity. A good word can save someone's life – or destroy him – if the word is evil and demeaning. I think it is all reflected in the manner of expression. Does one just release the word and forget about it, not caring if it hurts someone, or does he "enter into his word," remain a part of it? Are our words just "talk" without substance? Do we stand behind our words, or do we throw them out – and run, separating ourselves from the damage they have wrought?

Words can be soothing, invigorating, encouraging, enlivening. They can be transmitters of joy; they can make a person feel that someone cares about them, that they are not alone. It all depends on whether the words are real or are simply words spoken, but not really reflecting the personality and character of the author, because he has already divorced himself from them and escaped. One must be part of the words that he articulates, because how one expresses himself is as important as what he says.

The *teivah* was one large floating container that housed the future of the world in an area which could best be described as "close." There was nowhere to go. Whatever was said had to be supported. Noach fed all the animals and fowl 24/7, with no rest. How he brought the food, what he said, and how he said it were all as important as the actual food. The smile that accompanied his acts of kindness could be a game-changer that made a huge difference in the attitude of the recipient. The *teivah* was an enormous floating *chesed* operation.

The generation of the Flood was destroyed due to a lack of morality, reflected in their interpersonal relationships. People did whatever they wanted without respect for, or sensitivity towards, their fellow. The Torah states that they were guilty of *chamas*, theft. *Chamas* is a form of theft whereby the "buyer" takes and pays, even though the seller is not interested in selling. There is no conversation between them. The seller plunks down the cash and leaves: no respect; no sensitivity; no conversation.

Chesed performed without respect for the recipient is not much different, because it reflects the

benefactor's lack of respect. It is all in what we say, how we say it, and the smile that accompanies the communication. Words? What are mere words? Plenty. They define our actions. They represent who we are. Words properly spoken and presented can save. Misplaced words can be devastating. The *teivah* taught its travelers the significance of properly tooled speech.