

## **Noach was a righteous person. (6:9)**

Noach's reputation as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, appears solid. He stood alone against a generation that had transformed corruption into a culture, a society that embraced and embodied decadence. One man against a world. This was Noach. He was compelled to live alone because, otherwise, the evil influence would have overpowered him. An individual who possesses such strength of character was worthy of being spared during the great Flood that engulfed the world. Eventually, it was Noach who was charged with rebuilding the world.

Despite Noach's personal distinction, the waters of the Flood are called *mei Noach*, waters of Noach, as if he is being blamed for the disaster of the Flood. Why is this? How is Noach, on the one hand, called a *tzaddik*, and, on the other hand, he is excoriated and held responsible for the Flood? The *Zohar HaKadosh* explains that Noach's personal distinction notwithstanding, at the end of the day he did not petition Hashem on behalf of the people of his generation, to show mercy and spare them from extinction.

It is not as if Noach sat around doing nothing for 120 years. He built a massive ark, hoping that people would take notice and question him about why he was doing this. Once he was able to engage them in conversation, he would inform them of the impending catastrophe that was going to destroy them. Perhaps, they would listen and repent. They did neither. Avraham *Avinu* took a different approach with regard to *kiruv*, outreach. He reached out by leaving the comfort zone of his environment and traveling around engaging people in conversation, thereby calling out in the Name of Hashem. The difference between Noach and Avraham is essentially their varied approaches to *kiruv*. Noach waited for people to come to him. Avraham went out and searched for opportunities to reach out to people.

In his *Messages From Rav Pam*, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the *Rosh Yeshivah's* observation of our generation as being quite like the *Dor HaMabul*, generation of the Flood. Veritably, we all lead an insular lifestyle. We are (for the most part) protected from the harsh, impure environment, with its corruption, moral turpitude and lack of respect for anything spiritual. Do we think only of ourselves and our families, or do we feel a sense of *achrayos*, responsibility, for our fellow Jews who are literally drowning in a sea of confusion, ravaged by the waves of atheism and decadence? I am not even mentioning the addictions to the base media and drugs, which, in all reality, should be considered weapons of mass destruction. Our people – from all walks of life – are succumbing to the spiritual onslaught on their physical and spiritual lives; yet we (for the most part) sit comfortably sheltered and protected from the deluge that is daily taking its terrible toll.

Rav Pam recalled an incident to which he was privy during his hospitalization for an illness. His roommate was a young non-practicing Jewish man, who had been critically injured in an automobile accident. For a while, he was in a coma. Afterwards, the road to recovery was long and difficult. The accident had taken its toll on his internal organs, which would take some time to heal. His wife was very supportive, hardly ever leaving his bedside, other than to go home to change.

She would sit by him all day, offering words of encouragement to imbue him with a will to live. His body had been so utterly devastated, he was prone to bouts of depression and despair. Rav Pam noticed that she would not eat when she visited her husband – even during meal times. He asked her why she did not eat. If she were to maintain her rigid schedule of helping her husband to recover, she would need physical stamina. By not eating, she was sabotaging her goal. Her reply was inspiring, “My husband cannot eat due to his severe internal injuries. How can I eat in front of him?”

What incredible sensitivity! (This, in and of itself, is worthy of a paper.) The *Rosh Yeshivah* said that these simple words, spoken from the heart of a *Yiddishe neshamah*, made a profound impression on him. How can we, Torah Jews, “eat” i.e. live a comfortable, fulfilling, inspirational Torah life, knowing that the majority of our people are unable to “eat” and will probably never have the opportunity to enjoy such a meaningful life, because most of them have never had a chance? They were never exposed – either purposefully, maliciously, or due to fear and ignorance – to wholesome Torah living. Therefore, we should not repeat the error for which the *Zohar HaKadosh* criticizes Noach. We should do our utmost to bring our fellow Jews closer to a life of the spirit – a life replete with Torah and *mitzvos*.

I would like to take this a bit further. Many of us are in communities that are home to numerous *baalei teshuvah*, individuals, young folk, men and women and families, who, after being exposed to a Torah life, have broken with their past. Many have been ostracized by their families for their decision to become observant. It was a powerful and compelling life-altering decision to make. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to enjoy the same Torah *nachas* that *frum*-from-birth families enjoy. I will never forget attending a wedding of a friend’s daughter, someone who had done well, raised a beautiful Torah family and was reaping the *nachas* that comes with this way of life. I stood there during the dancing with another friend – a *baal teshuvah*, who embraced a Torah-observant lifestyle later in life. We were both looking at our mutual friend dancing with his sons and sons-in-law, and he remarked to me, somewhat sadly, “I guess that is one part of Orthodoxy I will never experience.” I did not know what to say, but I came to realize that we must be sensitive to the tug at the heart which they experience when they hear of and see our *nachas*. To show off our albums, pictures of our grandchildren, to relate about our family *simchas*, joyous occasions, is like eating in front of a person whose internal organs have been damaged. This idea obviously applies to all situations in which we are with someone who does not have what we have, such as: telling our economically – challenged friends about our trip to Europe, etc; sharing pictures of our milestone occasions with those who have yet to experience such milestones; speaking of weddings to the young man or woman who has yet to find his/her *bashert*; sharing our children’s milestones with the young who has yet to be blessed with their first child; showing pictures of our grandchildren to parents who have yet to make their first wedding. The list sadly continues, but, I think (I hope), the reader understands what I mean.