

Hashem shut (the Ark) on his behalf. (7:16)

The Torah seems to intimate that the “door” to the *teivah*, Ark, was closed, implying that its inhabitants were safe from the menacing rains. *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Yonason* write, *V'agan Hashem b'meimra aleih*; “and Hashem shielded him with His Word.” This implies that the Ark was merely the vehicle for its inhabitants to gather and allow for the word of Hashem to protect them. The Ark was not their means of protection. It was Hashem. *Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl*, offers an explanation based on the *Rabbinic* maxim *K'shebaah andarlemusia l'olam, einah mavcheves bein reshaim l'tzadikim*, “When chaos comes upon the world, it does not distinguish between the wicked and the righteous” (*Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Bo*). This means that during times of widespread calamity or judgment (war, plague or destruction), even righteous people perish alongside the wicked. Chaos and strict judgment make no moral distinctions –they engulf all. Therefore, the *teivah* should not have been the protection of its inhabitants. It was a time of *g'zar din*, decree of strict judgment, from which there is no hiding – everyone is in danger – perpetrator and innocents together. The *teivah* was the place in which all would gather so they could all be in one place, thus granting it exclusionary status, as if it were a world of its own. The decree was specifically for the inhabitants of the world whose society had become morally corrupt. The Ark was a different world within a world.

Hashem selected the Ark as the locus where Noach and family and all the creatures that accompanied him were to remain. Thus, if anyone made his own private Ark, it would not protect him. When Hashem first spoke to Noach, He did not indicate that water would be His means of destroying that generation. This came later. Indeed, once Hashem gave His word/blessing, the *teivah* was able to protect from water, fire or any means/weapons of destruction.

Chazal (Midrash Tehillim 37) relate that Avraham Avinu asked Malkitzedek (Shem *ben* Noach), “How were you able to leave the *teivah*? (In what merit were you able to leave and enter the world as it was?)” Shem replied, “It was in the merit of the *tzedakah* (in this context it would mean charitable acts of kindness).” Avraham asked, “What need was there for *tzedakah*? No poor people were on board.” Shem replied, “Animals and beasts have different eating schedules. As a result, we were always feeding an animal or beast. We were unable to get any sleep.” It was this selfless act of lovingkindness that earned them the merit to leave the Ark. Avraham realized that the most important source of merit is derived from helping others, from sustaining and addressing their physical needs. This motivated Avraham to establish his famous *eishel*, rest area, welcome center, where the traveler could take a break, eat, “shower” and spend the night. We derive from here the idea that acts of *chesed* present the greatest opportunities for garnering Heavenly reward.

Noticeably, Avraham asked Shem, “In what merit were you allowed to (safely) leave the Ark?” He did not ask, “In what merit were you saved from the waters of the Flood?” The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that Noach was spared from death because he was in the Ark which Hashem had designated as a sanctuary, a place to allow Noach and his family to live. This was how they survived. If they had left without permission, they would have died like everyone else. The *teivah*

was their place of refuge. Had they not had a special *z'chus*, merit, they would have remained in the Ark their entire lives. It was their acts of lovingkindness that allowed them access to a new life.

The *teivah* was its own little world; its only replacement was an act of *chesed*. This demonstrates the importance of the *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*. We should never look lightly at acts of *chesed*. Who knows? Those acts of helping others might become our lifesaver.