

Noach was a righteous man. (6:9)

Can one be considered righteous if his righteousness is due to his seclusion from the world for six centuries? Apparently, the Torah refers to Noach as righteous, despite the fact that he had no influence on the members of the society in which he lived. He really had no alternative. The evil of his generation was so pervasive that had he attempted to reach out, not only would he have been rebuffed, he himself might have become a victim. The *Zohar HaKadosh* observes that the waters of the flood are called *mei Noach* (*Yeshayah* 54:9), waters of Noach, as if to imply that he was somehow culpable for the Flood, because he did not reach out enough to prevent the tragedy. Had he prayed harder and longer, Hashem may have averted or delayed the Flood. Noach did not exert himself sufficiently to inspire the people to *teshuva*, repentance. Why? Perhaps he was afraid that being with them would influence him. Maybe he feared physical harm and abuse if he would get in their way. It may even be that he was disgusted, repulsed and appalled by their behavior.

We live in a time in which the majority of our people have fallen victim to the allure of contemporary society. Although their ignorance borders on atheism, and their immorality is close to hedonism, these people have not escaped participation in Jewish life on some level. While we may not be able to stem the tide, unquestionably, every *neshamah* that we pull out of the muck is a win for Hashem and a spiritual life resuscitated. What about our empathy for them? Are we that disgusted by their behavior that we have stopped caring? Is our attitude: “Let them go their way, and we will go ours?”

Horav Avraham Pam, zl (quoted in “Messages from Rav Pam” by Rabbi Sholom Smith), relates an incident to which he was privy when he was hospitalized. His roommate was a young non-observant Jewish man who had sustained serious injuries in a car accident. For a while he was in a coma, after which he required intense physical therapy. His road to recovery would be long and difficult, because his internal organs had been severely damaged. He was fed by feeding tube. His wife sat by his bed all day, offering words of comfort. The *Rosh Yeshivah* noticed that, even during meal time, she did not leave his side. He wondered when she ate. He asked her why she did not eat in the room. She replied, “My husband cannot eat due to his severe internal injuries. How could I eat in front of him?”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* took these innocent empathy-filled words to heart. He extrapolated a vital lesson for us. So many Jews who, due to their estrangement from Torah, are “unable to eat,” to partake in the beauty of a Torah life. How can we not empathize with them? We should make every effort to reach out and save whomever we can. It is our responsibility.