

# Caring For The Klal

Dear Parents,

As our minds and hearts continue to be consumed with fear and concern for the situation in *Eretz Yisrael*, we are hopefully focusing on things we can do to help; primarily in the spiritual realm, but in the practical, physical sphere as well. There is an additional element that we should be concerned with, that is of great importance for every individual, young and old.

**We are engulfed in a battle between good and evil.**

Most people have a worldview that neatly categorizes the righteous on one side and the villains on the other. Think *Avraham*, *Yosef*, *Moshe* and then *Esav*, *Paroh* and *Haman*. In studying this week's *Parsha*, however, our hero *Noach* seems not to fall neatly into any category.

The *Torah* (*Bereishis* 6:9) describes *Noach* as *Ish Tzaddik Tamim Haya*, a purely righteous person, a very high standing indeed. And yet, the very next word *B'Dorosov* qualifies that description of *Noach* as only relative to or dependent on others. The *Gemara* and *Midrashim* bring these two opposing viewpoints in assessing *Noach's* true level. This *machlokes* (dispute) is famous enough that most elementary school children can recall it practically in their sleep!

The negative view brought by *Rashi* on the *Pasuk*, quoting the *Medrash Tanchuma* (section 5) and *Medrash Rabba* (30:9) is astounding. This man *Noach*, who was so great that he merited to be saved along with his family while the entire world was swept away in the Flood, who faithfully and publically followed *Hashem's* command to work on the construction of a *Tayva* (ark) for 120 years while withstanding the taunts, threats and ridicule of the entire civilized world, has the following said about him: "...if he would have lived in the generation of *Avraham*, he would not have been considered of any significance."

How can we understand this? On the one hand *Noach* and only *Noach* merited salvation from the flood through great miracles, but at the same time he was lacking some quality that rendered him insignificant next to *Avraham*? The *mefarsh* (super commentary) *B'eir Basodeh* on *Rashi* explains that what was missing from *Noach* was empathy, a burning feeling of concern for others. He believed in *Hashem* and did exactly what he was commanded. **He accepted Hashem's decree and did not utter a word of protest.**

The *Medrash Tanchuma* compares that to *Avraham Avinu*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* and *Dovid HaMelech*. When they were informed of - impending doom for *Sodom* in *Avrohom's* case, or the Jewish people in *Moshe's* case and even of the illness of his enemies in *Dovid's* case (*Tehillim* 35:13), their immediate reaction was to protest and pray on behalf of their brothers. *Avrohom*, whose entire life's mission was threatened by the people of *Sodom*, nevertheless pleaded for their salvation. *Moshe* was willing to give up everything and declared - wipe me out, rather than destroy *Klal Yisrael* as *Hashem* threatened by the sin of the *Golden Calf*.

What was *Noach's* reaction in the face of *Hashem's* pronouncement of mankind's looming destruction? Silence. Not one word of protest is recorded in the *Torah*. This was not merely a nuance of a shortcoming in *Noach's tzidkus*. This was a fundamental lack in his makeup and worldview that made his other great qualities pale into insignificance relative to *Avraham Avinu*.

This point has great relevance for us and our children. Along with the *Tefilla*, *Chesed* and *Ma'asim Tovim* we are involved with, increasing the *kedusha* in the fight against their *tumah*, we need to do an internal check on ourselves to see how much are we sharing in the pain, distress and suffering of *Acheinu Bnei Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*. Are we going about our business as usual, focused on our comfort and pleasures? Do we dwell on how annoying it is that Amazon was two hours late with our package, or is our mind focused on what hundreds of thousands of our fellow Jews feel and fear each night as they (try to) go to sleep with their loved ones in harm's way? Do we think about the 18 year olds, not merely should our children stay in Israel for the year (and what a *zechus* that is), but rather the 18 year olds, (our Jewish *kinderlach*) who are poised to enter Gaza and face mortal danger?

The spiritual accomplishments that will help tip the heavenly scale in our favor and bring us victory over our enemies, rely heavily on our being *נושא בעול עם חבירו* - *sharing the burden with our fellow*. Whatever we may achieve in *Torah*, *Tefilla* and *Mitzvos*, needs to be empowered by an equally strong track record of empathy - in feeling and caring for others and being willing to sacrifice some of our needs for the sake of others.

We have a great opportunity in this time of trouble to help our children develop the all-important *midah* of empathy.

**Caring about others is a quality that must be developed.** Children are born completely selfish and self-centered. They need to see role models who care for others outside their immediate circle. We can express concern and reduce to some small extent the luxuries and frivolities that we have become habituated to. We then should verbalize the idea - that if our brothers are going through such difficult times, we can do without the extra treat, additional fun activity or extra time at a party. Our children can think about those who are confined to the indoors, who can't be with their friends and who haven't had their favorite food in weeks. Doing something positive - extra *Tehillim*, saying *Brochos* clearly and out loud, answering *Amein*, perhaps a lemonade stand to raise money (or charge 1 *perek Tehillim* per cup!) or writing a letter to friends and relatives are all ways to help and strengthen their empathy muscle.

Our hearts are greatly impacted by what has happened and our emotions are running high. However, empathic feelings for those suffering can easily be swallowed up by a preoccupation with the details of military maneuvers, political machinations and frustration with an indifferent world. The process of strengthening empathy for our fellow needs to be a conscious effort and focus. It should be a recurring refrain when discussing the *matzav* with our children.

May our spiritual efforts be strengthened through our deep empathy for our fellow *Yidden* and may our *Torah*, *tefillos* and empathy together, enable our physical *hishtadlus* to actualize victory over our enemies.

Best wishes for a *Shabbos* of caring,



Rabbi Kalman Baumann  
Principal, EEC/KES/BTE

