

From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Noach 5780

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.

**...if he would have lived
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Avraham, he would not
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any significance.**

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 *Avraham'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. *Avraham*, 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*.

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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. Whatever we may achieve in *Torah*, *Tefilla* and *Mitzvos* is practically negated if we don't have an equally strong track record in feeling and caring for others and being willing to sacrifice some of our needs for the sake of others. A *tzaddik* who cares only for himself, is really not much of a *tzaddik*.

With this in mind, we expend great thought and effort in *Yeshiva* to help everyone feel part of our community, and that no one is alone. We work constantly to reduce and eliminate bullying behavior which is the exact antithesis of caring for others. We are in the midst of *Middos* programs that reinforce that message. The *tzaddikim* and *tzidkaniyos* that are developing in our midst are hearing the message over and over again – that only by caring for others, standing up for others, including others and respecting others can they truly take pride in their own accomplishments.

Parents need to reinforce the same message through word and deed. The pursuit of spiritual perfection, which is the primary goal of every Jew, can only be successful when we care for others as much as we care to follow our own *Mitzvah* obligations to *Hashem*. Supporting others and devoting ourselves to their needs, is indeed our ultimate obligation to the Creator.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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