

He Didn't Scream
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ג'ל

Parshat Noah

The Prophet Isaiah (54:9) calls the Flood נַחַי מַי, *mei No'ah*, the waters of Noah. Why, it has been asked, does Noah bear the blame for the Flood? What does the text tell us?

Noah was a saintly man. (Genesis 6:9)

The world had become corrupt in G*d's eyes. (Genesis 6:11)

G*d said to Noah, "The world has become full of violence." (Genesis 6:13)

And on and on. But why do we attach Noah's name explicitly to the Flood waters?

"The end of all flesh has come before Me," G*d says to Noah. (Genesis 6:13) People lived so long in those times (Genesis tells us of life spans of 600, 700, 800, 900 years) that they failed to feel the approach of death, of a limitation on the length of their lives. They robbed and plundered with no thought to the consequences of their actions, with no consciousness of the eventual approach of death, with no awareness that death would take all their ill-gotten wealth from them.

And G*d tells Noah and instructs Noah to build an ark, and Noah and his immediate family are saved, along with just enough specimens of each species of animal that the world can be repopulated. Noah seems to be a "good guy;" why, then, is he subjected to the ignominy of having his name attached to the Flood?

The ancient Talmudic sages tell us that Noah is blamed for the Flood because he did not do enough to prevent it. Prevent it? But it was G*d Who brought the Flood; what could a mere mortal have done? Well, our sages tell us, a great many things.

Noah could have prayed; he could have argued with G*d. When G*d tells Abraham of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 28), Abraham argues with G*d. **"Perhaps there are fifty righteous individuals in the city. . . . Shall**

not the judge of all the world judge justly? . . . What if there are forty-five? . . . Forty? . . .Thirty? . . . Twenty? . . . Ten?” And G*d agrees to spare those corrupt cities if as few as ten righteous individuals could be found therein.

Abraham argued with G*d. Why did Noah not argue with G*d? Why did Noah not pray for G*d's Mercy upon the world?

There is a tradition which, in a strange anachronism, asserts that Noah, knowing that there were not even ten righteous individuals in the world and knowing that Abraham's G*d-wrestling would fail because there were fewer than ten righteous individuals in the five cities of the plain, refrained from an argument and a prayer which he knew would be in vain. But what difference should the possibility of success make? If the cause is just, we strive for it, even if our chances of success are slim, even if our chances of success are minimal, even if we KNOW that we will lose! I. F. Stone even went so far as to say, "The only kinds of fights worth fighting are those you're going to lose, because somebody has to fight them and lose and lose and lose until, someday, somebody who believes as you do wins. In order for somebody to win an important, major fight one hundred years hence, a lot of other people have got to be willing – for the sheer fun and joy of it – to go right ahead and fight, knowing you're going to lose. You mustn't feel like a martyr. You've got to enjoy it."

Why are the Flood waters called the "the waters of Noah"? Because Noah didn't pray. Because Noah didn't scream. Because Noah didn't fight, didn't argue with G*d. If the destruction of the world had really bothered him, Noah would have pled with G*d, argued with G*d, railed at G*d, even knowing that there were fewer than ten righteous individual in the world and even – especially – knowing that fewer than ten righteous individuals wouldn't be able to save the world. If it hurts, you scream.

We must share in the pain of others, even when the ability to alleviate that pain is beyond our grasp. As the English poet Robert Browning declared, "A man's reach must exceed his grasp, or else what's a heaven for?" We must share in the pain of others, even when the ability to alleviate that pain is beyond our grasp; otherwise the next Flood may be ours.

Shabbat Shalom.

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