

# BELIEVING AND NOT BELIEVING

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"And Noach, his sons, and his wife came with him because of the waters of the flood." — Bereishis 7:7

HASHEM told Noach that his entire generation was wicked and would be destroyed. Only he, his family, and certain select animals would be saved. When the flood actually began, the *posuk* says that Noach and his family went into the Ark "**because of the waters of the flood.**" Rashi observes that these words imply that it was the water that caused Noach to go into the *tayva*, not Hashem's command. Therefore, Rashi says that Noach was "One who believed and didn't believe." On one hand, he believed that HASHEM would bring the flood, but on the other, he didn't believe it would happen. Therefore, he didn't actually go into the *tayvah* until the rains forced him in.

This Rashi becomes difficult to understand when we take into account some of the background of the event.

## Noach was a Tzaddik

Noach is called a righteous man, so much so that HASHEM chose him to be the single person to rebuild the human race. So how is it possible that when HASHEM told him there would be a flood, he didn't believe it?

This question comes into sharper relief when we view the situation in its broader context. Many of the *Rishonim* ask, "Why did HASHEM ask Noach to build the *tayvah*? If HASHEM wanted to destroy the generation and save Noach, there are many ways He could have done it. Why trouble this *tzaddik* to draw the plans, cut the wood, and fit together the pieces? HASHEM could have miraculously saved him without Noach having to become a carpenter.

Rashi answers that HASHEM wanted to give the generation one final opportunity to do *tshuvah*. When Noach would work on the *tayvah*, people would see him and ask, "What are you building?" "HASHEM told me He is going to destroy the world," he would answer. "The only hope is to repent. Do *tshuvah*."

For 120 years, while he was building the *tayvah*, Noach was on a mission to convince his neighbors that HASHEM was going to bring a *mabul* and destroy the inhabited world . . . unless they changed their ways.

With this, the question becomes much stronger. Here we have a man whom the Torah calls a *tzaddik*, whom HASHEM spoke to directly. He was told by HASHEM Himself exactly what would happen. He then spent year after year preaching that very message to the people. How is it possible that he didn't believe it himself?

## The nature of man

The answer to this question is based on understanding the nature of man. When HASHEM created the human, He joined together two divergent elements and fused them into one entity. Part of me only wants to do what is right and proper, only wishes for that which is good, and yearns to be close to HASHEM. That part of me, the *Nefesh Ha'Sichili* or the spiritual soul, is untainted, pure intellect. It is the part of me that understands exactly why I was created.

However, there is another part of me, a *Nefesh Ha'Bahami* or a physical soul. This other part is also vibrant and has needs, but its aspirations, drives, and desires only relate to that which is physical. It only sees the here and now. In its world, if I can't hear it, feel it, or see it, it doesn't exist.

When I engage in any spiritual activity, these two components of me are in direct conflict. For instance, when I *daven*, part of me feels a deep, inner yearning to grow ever closer to HASHEM, and part of me is bored. Part of me is aglow because I am connecting to my Creator, and part of me just doesn't care. The *Nefesh Ha'Bahami* doesn't see HASHEM, can't relate to HASHEM, and therefore doesn't have any connection to anything spiritual.

As long as a person lives, there will be a part of his essence that denies the existence of HASHEM, not because that part is rebellious, nor because it wants to do anything wrong, but because it is incapable of seeing anything that isn't physical. The more a person grows, the more clearly he relates to his spiritual side, and the less the *Nefesh Ha'Bahami* clouds his vision. However, as long as I am housed in a body, this darkness remains a part of me.

## The answer to Noach

The answer to the question seems to be that Noach was a real believer. He had a powerful, unwavering belief that everything that HASHEM said would happen, would indeed come true. But that was only half of him. There was another part of Noach that didn't see HASHEM, couldn't relate to Him, and couldn't see anything beyond the here and the now. That part denied that there would ever be a flood.

Even an *ish tzaddik*, who spent 120 years engaged in teaching that HASHEM was going to bring a flood, was still a human, and as such, he couldn't fully see it happening. It wasn't until the rain started that it became real to him, and then he went into the *tayvah*.

## **The darkness of physicality**

This concept is very relevant to us because no matter what level a person has reached, there will always be a part of him that denies anything spiritual. There will always be a part of me that feels alone in this world because it cannot see HASHEM, nor even relate to anything that is not physical. However, there is another full dimension of me that intuitively knows that HASHEM is right here, running the world, involved in every detail of my life.

Rabbi Shafier is the founder of the Shmuz.com – The Shmuz is an engaging, motivating shiur that deals with real life issues.

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