

ARK D'TRIUMPH

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

You gotta believe. Day in, day out for 120 years, Noah built an ark. Naysayers and scoffers chided him, mocked him, and continued on their path to self-destruction. But Noah continued to build.

It must have been terribly difficult for Noah. A man alone, predicting calamity. He was the only human doing something to save himself. Yet despite 10 years of outreach and cajoling to curious onlookers to mend their evil ways, he was not able to persuade one member of civilization to join him. Why?

The Torah tells us that when Noah finally entered the ark for the journey of salvation amidst the world's destruction he almost had to be forced. "And Noah entered the ark because of the flood waters" (Genesis 7:7). Rashi explains that even Noah himself was considered one of those with only modest faith. Noah did not enter the ark until the rains fell and he realized that disaster was imminent.

Surely his failing was minute by our standards. After all, Noah was handpicked by G-d Almighty to save and perpetuate civilization. Yet his minor flaw is recorded. There must be a lesson for all of us in the Torah's documentation of it.

British physician John Abernathy, in addition to being a renowned surgeon and teacher in the late 18th Century, helped patients with an array of emotional problems. He once related the story of a patient who entered his clinic complaining of severe bouts of melancholy and depression. It seems that the artisan lost faith in his own abilities. He felt he was not living up to his normal standard. He was beginning to fail at his life's work. After examining him, Dr. Abernathy made a simple suggestion.

"Go see the famous comedian, Grimaldi. He is known to cheer those who are depressed and he would do wonders for your spirit. He will make you laugh and that would be better than any drug I should prescribe."

The patient looked even glummer. "It won't help me," sighed the despondent patient. "I am Grimaldi."

Noah worked extremely hard to build the ark, but he could not rehabilitate one soul. Perhaps the Torah tells us the reason why he was unable to convince anyone to join him.

Noah himself would not enter the ark until the rains forced him in. He did not run to the boat with a

battle-cry of unshaken faith. For whatever reason, perhaps he felt that G-d's compassion would ultimately overcome His wrath: still, he did not show clear, unwavering belief that the flood would come.

In order to bring Jews close to Torah, in order to build souls, one must be steeped in the faith so powerfully that he need not be pushed into his own ark of his own salvation. In addition to building it, he must breathe it, live it and be totally committed to it.

One can build great arks, but unless the passion of his faith exudes from his soul, it may never touch others. He may save himself and his family, but no more.

My grandfather, zt"l, once told me that if a certain secular writer would have seen the Chofetz Chaim, he could never have believed that man evolved from a monkey. The Chofetz Chaim's radiance emanated a spirit which thundered the sanctity of his very essence.

In order to promote true faith one must be unwavering in his own commitment. Any lack thereof, albeit well intentioned, may get lost in a large, doubting crowd. For without one's own sense of absolute faith he will never lead others into his own ark d'triumph.

Good Shabbos!

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