

INTERNAL BELIEFS HAVE EXTERNAL EFFECTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And Noach went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives, went with him into the Ark, because of the waters of the flood." [Gen. 7:7]

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki says (from the Medrash Tanchuma) that Noach "believed and did not believe" that there would be a flood, so he did not enter the Ark until the last moment, when the rising water forced him to enter.

What does this mean? This comment by Rashi would appear to make no sense. The Medrash tells us that Noach built the Ark over a period of 120 years, to save himself and his family! If he doubted the flood was coming, why was he building a boat in his backyard?

Several years ago, a small yeshiva in Israel was attempting to recruit more students. One Rabbi there was familiar with a high school in America, and he strongly believed that the students of that school would benefit most if they continued their studies in his yeshiva. So he called a friend, a teacher there, and asked - since the students didn't know the Israeli Rabbi - if the latter himself could work to convince his students that they should go to the yeshiva in question.

The American Rabbi replied that unfortunately, he would be unable to fulfill his friend's request. Not because he didn't believe that the yeshiva had wonderful benefits, but simply because he had not had the opportunity to observe and to become fully convinced that this was indeed the destination of choice for his students. He explained his position by referring to Noach in our parsha.

The reason why Noach was supposed to take such a long time building the Ark is because it offered people a last opportunity to change their behavior. They would come and ask Noach what he was doing, and he would explain - and encourage them to abandon their immorality before it was too late. And yet he had no impact; no one outside Noach's immediate family was spared. Asked the Rabbi: was Noach so much worse than Rabbi Noach Weinberg? [Rabbi Weinberg, the Dean of Aish HaTorah institutions, is world-renowned in Jewish outreach.] Why was Noach unable to convince even one member of his generation to change his behavior?

The answer is that there is a great difference between belief of the mind and belief of the heart. It is one thing to believe intellectually that something is true, and quite another to feel it intensely, in the

heart. The Birkas Peretz says that Noach certainly believed the flood was coming... but on an intellectual level. If he had internalized this knowledge and had truly feared the coming flood, he would certainly have entered the Ark immediately.

It was for this reason, explained the Rabbi, that Noach could not affect his generation. Because he himself only believed that the flood was coming on an intellectual level, he had no impact. Had he feared the destruction on a visceral, internal level, _then_ he would have been able to reach others. [It should be pointed out that this doubt was not necessarily a point against Noach - many say that he held onto the hope that G-d would be merciful, even at the last moment. But in any case, it made no difference:] Since Noach did not feel absolute certainty in his heart, he could not adequately transmit this fear to others.

The same principle held true for the Rabbi, and it holds true for us: if our beliefs are merely acknowledged on an intellectual level, then others will perceive the shallowness, and our words will have little impact. If we truly hope to influence those around us, then we must first feel the importance of our beliefs through the core of our being.