

DON'T SHOUT AT ME!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Make for yourself an Ark of Gopher wood, make it with cages, and cover it inside and outside with pitch." [6:14]

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) asks: why did G-d call upon Noach to build an Ark? There are many ways that G-d could protect or save all those who eventually rode in the Ark -- so why the construction project?

The answer is that construction of the Ark was supposed to become not only common knowledge, but an inspiration. Noach spent 120 years building it, in order that his generation would see him building it and ask him what he was doing. And he would answer that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was going to send a flood -- and perhaps they would change their behavior.

Yet as we see, no one did. When the prophet Yonah came to the city of Nineveh and told them that G-d was going to destroy the city because of their evil behavior, everyone immediately stopped what they were doing. The King himself came down off his throne, and sat on the ground wearing sack cloth. But in Noach's generation, no one changed his behavior; no one outside his immediate family was saved.

What was the difference? Why was Noach unable to have an impact in 120 years?

I heard the following answer: we see later in the parsha that "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] Rashi 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.

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 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. [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.

In the Torah, we learn that we have a mitzvah to correct others when they make mistakes: "...you shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and you shall not bear sin because of him." [Lev. 19:17] But the word "rebuke" has harsh connotations which are entirely inappropriate in this context. What is supposed to take place is a heart-to-heart transmission of love and concern for the individual making the error. A person should correct himself or herself first, for otherwise, how can he or she claim to be motivated only by the severity of the issue? And similarly, Maimonides says that the rebuke must be delivered in a gentle voice -- and Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin said that this is a mandatory prerequisite. One cannot fulfill the mitzvah of rebuke by shouting.

When someone is truly motivated by knowledge of the truth and concern for the other individual, then he or she will not yell at the other person, but will speak gently. Shouting isn't merely a technical disqualification; it is evidence that this "rebuke" is being delivered for the wrong reasons.

We have a mitzvah of "rebuke" because it is yet another opportunity to demonstrate our care, concern and love for others. We, too, have up to 120 years to deliver the message -- let's be certain we're able to have an impact!