TO SHARE IN THE PAIN OF OTHERS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read Parshas Noach. Ten generations after the creation of Adam Harishon, the first man, the world has been corrupted. "Vatishaches ha'aretz lifnei HaElokim (6:11)" - and the world was in a (spiritually) destroyed state before Hashem. Rashi explains that the term 'vatishaches' refers specifically to immorality and idol worship. "Vatimalay ha'aretz chamas" - and the land was filled with thievery. Hashem decides to flood the world, saving only Noach and his family, the only righteous individuals. Through them, the new world will be built.

"Vayomer Elokim l'Noach, ketz kol bassar ba l'fanoi" - And Hashem said to Noach, the (time for the) end of all flesh has come before me - "ki mal'ah ha'aretz chamas (6:13)" - because the land has been filled with thievery. Interestingly, with all of the major sins being performed, the decree was sealed due to thievery!

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that thievery is at the very core of every sin. Every person is allotted a certain amount of time and energy on this earth. This is given to allow the individual to build a relationship with his Creator by spiritually adding to this world that which only he can add. Every moment is measured and precious. When a person takes this gift and abuses it. When ones energy is used to perform an act that distances him from his Creator by spiritually polluting the world, that constitutes thievery in its most basic sense. Stealing the power granted to us by Hashem to help eternally help ourselves by using it to infinitely hurt ourselves. When the earth is filled with such acts, that is the time for the end of all flesh.

The Kli Yakar writes that the term 'ketz kol bassar', the end of all flesh, is referring to the 'yom ha'missah', the day of death. "Ba l'fanoi!" Hashem tells Noach that it has come before Him. It is complaining! No one thinks of me! Their lives are so long, no one feels threatened by the consequences of their actions. They rob and plunder without realizing that the 'yom hamissah' will take it away from them. As the Chovos Halevovos writes, a person can spend his whole life amassing a fortune that his wife will enjoy with her second husband. "V'hinnei mashchisom" - I will destroy them.

In the face of all of this stands Noach, a righteous and complete individual. Only he and his family didn't join the depravity of the society. Only they were saved. Yet, the prophet Yeshaya (54:9) refers to the floodwaters as "mei Noach", the waters of Noach. We are accustomed to Noach's name being used in regard to the miracle of his survival. Noach's Ark, etc. But, in what way was Noach held responsible for the destruction that the flood was called by his name?

Chaza"l explain that the floodwaters were called by his name because he didn't pray for his generation to be saved! Why, in fact, didn't Noach pray?

In order to understand this we need to have some background information. A bit later on in Breishis we'll learn that Hashem, while planning to destroy the cities of Sdom and Amora, reveals his intention to Avraham Avinu. Avraham begins to plead with Hashem to save the cities if they will find there fifty righteous individuals. When Hashem agreed, Avraham continued to plead to save the cities for the sake of an even lesser number of righteous people. This continues until Hashem agrees not to destroy for the sake of even ten tzaddikim. At that point, Avraham stops praying. Chaza"l explain that Avraham had learned this from the generation of Noach. Noach had less that ten tzaddikim and their merit was not able to save the world.

At first glance this might seem to explain why Noach didn't pray. However, with further thought, it clearly doesn't suffice. As Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz asks, if Noach also understood that ten wouldn't save the world and that was the reason why he didn't pray, why was he held accountable? Why were the floodwaters labeled 'the waters of Noach'?

He explains based on another chaza"l. In the beginning of Shemos, when Paroah was deciding how to deal with his Jewish problem, he called upon three advisors, Bilaam, Yisro and Iyov. Bilaam spoke out against the Jews which is what Paroah had wanted to hear. Yisro spoke out in defense of the Jews and had to flee the wrath of Paroah. Iyov remained silent.

Hashem responds to our actions using 'midah k'neged midah'. This means that the response fits our act. Not simply a punishment but rather a means of revealing mistakes and rewarding proper acts. Let's see how this concept works through with the three advisors.

The ultimate end of Bilaam, who advised that the Jews should be killed, was that he was killed by the Jews. A clear example of midah k'neged midah. Yisro, who defended the Jews, ran for his life and settled in Midyan. There he met Moshe as he was fleeing from Paroah. Moshe married Yisro's daughter Tziporah, connecting Yisro to Klal Yisroel in a most intimate way. Once again, we see a very clear example of midah k'neged midah - the one who defended the Jews became part of the Jewish nation. However, when we come to the third advisor, Iyov, the connection is more difficult to understand. Iyov, who remained silent, suffered excruciating pain. How did that response fit his act?

Let's understand Iyov. He really had wanted to defend the Jews but, seeing the fate of Yisro, realized that his words would fall upon deaf ears. With nothing to gain by speaking, he remained silent. In order to reveal his error to him, Hashem sent 'yisurim', terrible pain. What does one do when experiencing intense pain? He screams! Even though the screams do nothing in terms of alleviating the pain, if it hurts, you scream. Hashem was teaching him that remaining silent showed that it didn't really bother him. Had Paroah's planned destruction of the Jews bothered him, he would have defended them.

With this, Rav Chaim explains our original difficulty. Why were the floodwaters called the 'the waters

of Noach'? Because he didn't pray. Because he didn't scream. If the destruction of the world would have really bothered him he would have pleaded with Hashem, even knowing that less than ten tzaddikim 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 might be out of our grasp.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos,

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