

# CAN YOU ENJOY WHILE OTHERS LACK?

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the parsha of Noach. "Aileh toldos Noach [These are the generations of Noach] Noach ish tzaddik... [Noach was a righteous man][6:9]." Whereas the rest of the world were abusing the free-will we discussed last week, Noach stood out as a shining example of what man was supposed to be. As Rashi explains, the main 'generations' that a person produces are the good acts performed. The generations of Noach were that Noach was such a pure tzaddik.

"And the land was in a destroyed state before Hashem and the land was filled with thievery [6:11]." Rashi explains that the 'destroyed' state came as a result of their immorality and idolatry. "And Hashem said to Noach (the time for) the end of all flesh has come before me because the land is filled with thievery [6:13]."

Why was their fate sealed because of the thievery as opposed to the immorality or idolatry? The Ramban explains that thievery was a known wrongdoing -- there was no need for any prophet to warn them about. Additionally, it is an offense against both man and Hashem.

Hashem tells Noach the measurements to which he should build the ark and for one hundred and twenty years, Noach, to the ridicule and scorn of the world, builds the ark.

We are humbled before the strength of a Noach. Standing alone against his entire generation. Living his whole life and educating his children in a way that was mocked by all those around him. Building a gigantic ark and gathering each type of animal and enough food to sustain them for a year. Hoping that all would see, take heed and mend their ways. Ultimately just causing more scorn and derision to be heaped upon himself. Yet, continuing on the path that he knew to be right. Such strength. Such conviction. Such faith...

Noach did all that he was commanded. No deviation whatsoever. At the 'tender' age of six hundred (imagine what that would do to Social Security!) the flood began. After six hundred long years of going against the entire world his position was finally vindicated. He and his family will be saved while the entire world would be destroyed.

"Va'yavo Noach... [Noach (and his family) entered the ark] mip'nei may ha'mabul [because of the flood waters][7:1]." What is meant that he entered "because of the flood waters"? The Medrash tells us that he was hesitating. Rav Yochanan teaches that he didn't enter the ark until the water had reached his ankles! Rashi, expounding on this, writes that even Noach believed and didn't believe that the flood would come. He didn't enter the ark until the water forced him in.

What happened?!?! How could six hundred years of faith fail him at the very moment that all he had believed in was being proven true?

The Steipler zt"l explains in the following way. Noach had an incredibly strong intellectual belief that the flood would come but not a real tangible belief. He believed but didn't believe...

If we had a court date set during which our fate and the fate of our family was going to be decided, we would be frantic with preparations. For weeks beforehand we'd be discussing different strategies, different angles through which we could present ourselves in the most favorable light. The night before we'd be tossing and turning, barely getting a few moments of sleep. Yet, on the days leading up to Rosh Hashana, when we know that we and our families are being judged and our fate for the forthcoming year is being decreed, our only worry is how long the services will take... We believe in Rosh Hashana being a day of judgment on an intellectual level but not on a tangible, practical level...

The Talmud [Brachos 28] relates that when Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai was ill, his students approached him for a blessing. His blessing was that their fear of heaven should be equal to their fear of man. The students were shocked. Shouldn't the fear of heaven be that much greater than the fear of man? He responded that when a person sins, his main concern is that no one should see him. Intellectually, the fear of heaven is greater. Tangibly, the fear of man is much greater.

The following story, found in Rabbi Twerski's Not Just Stories, beautifully illustrates the power of a tangible understanding. Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin had a chassid by the name of Reb Yitzchak. He was extremely poor but that never really bothered him. Who was he to tell Hashem how to distribute worldly assets? When he had an audience with the Rebbe his only requests were for guidance in spiritual growth.

Reb Yitzchak had a daughter of marriageable age but no dowry to offer a prospective groom. His wife pleaded with him to ask the Rebbe for a blessing. He assured her that he would, but when he next visited Kobrin and came before the Rebbe, he forgot about earthly concerns and again asked the Rebbe only for spiritual guidance.

Reb Yitzchak's wife lost patience with him. "If I can't rely on you then I'll have to go to the Rebbe myself!" Reb Yitzchak promised that next time he'd ask the Rebbe.

On his next trip to Kobrin, keeping to his word, he explained his plight to the Rebbe. Rav Moshe listened carefully and then said, "I will bless you with wealth but you first must do as I say."

He took out two gold coins and told Reb Yitzchak that he must follow his instructions without the slightest deviation. "Go home and use this money to buy the finest food, wine and delicacies available. Set the table for yourself and only you may eat from this food. Eat as much as you want but neither your wife or your children can taste even a morsel of it. Then come back here."

Reb Yitzchak was a loyal chassid and did as he was told. His wife and children watched as he ate his

sumptuous meal. He saw their mouths water as he lifted each forkful to his mouth. Seeing their expressions, he could hardly swallow the food. Yet the Rebbe had said that he must eat. The torment he experienced eating before his hungry family and not sharing with them was the worst torture he had ever felt in his entire life.

When Reb Yitzchak returned to Kobrin, the Rebbe said to him, "I will bless you with wealth and you and your family will have an abundance of everything. But, how much will you be able to enjoy it knowing that there are poor people with nothing to eat all day? The blessing for wealth is yours for the asking, Yitzchak. Do you still want it?"

"Never!" Reb Yitzchak exclaimed and he went home empty handed.

Reb Yitzchak's wife visited the Rebbe and did ask for the blessing. His fortunes improved and he became quite wealthy. Both he and his wife gave generously to the poor, but Reb Yitzchak never ate another meal at home. He funded the soup kitchen and ate each meal there along with the poor...

The tangible experience of eating heartily while others were hungry was one that he never forgot.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

---

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).

---