

# LEISURE TIME

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

*"And the land had become corrupted before G-d and the land had become filled with robbery"  
[Beresheet 6, 9]*

Noah was really a creative individual who had the talent to bring his father Lemekh's dream into fruition. Lemekh named his newborn son Noah [rest] stating: "This one will bring us rest from our work and the toil of our hands" [Ber, 5, 9]. Everyone is aware of the fact that Noah built the Ark that served as the sanctuary for all living things during the year of the flood but not many know that he also invented the plow, the scythe and the axe --tools that eased the backbreaking work of the farm [Midrash Tanhuma 11]. These timesaving devices gave the people of Noah's generation more free time than their hard-working ancestors.

One might think that such a blessing would yield more time for the spiritual aspects of life, but instead, the new-found leisure time resulted in the corruption of mankind. Crime, violence and immorality became the rage. Hashem instructed Noah to publicly build an Ark and thereby, perhaps, prompt his neighbors to repent. He spent 120 years at work on his floating animal reserve but to no avail. People only degenerated more and more during that time until Hashem finalized His decision to wipe out mankind via the Flood.

An analysis of the downfall will reveal that the more Hashem blessed the people the more wicked they became. The more free time they had the more they degenerated into immoral creatures. Jealousy of another's success not only made them unhappy with their own bounty but also brought them to lives of robbery and even murder.

In America at the turn of the 20th century most workers had to work almost 14 hours a day for 6 or 7 days a week just to earn the basic necessities. Child labor was also common in the sweatshops of the manufacturing sector. Crime? No one really had much time for it. Immorality?

Who had time or energy for that kind of activity? The post World War Two world is quite another story. Since the end of the War, America has created the richest lifestyle on the planet with oodles of free time and a whole new industry of entertainment and leisure. Theme parks, golf courses, restaurants, sports, theatres [even the "home theater" variety], vacations and spas are a multi-billion dollar industry.

Unfortunately, this generation has repeated the mistake of the Generation of the Flood. Freedom from the burden of earning a basic living is a blessing that can be turned into spiritual time. If the

time is well spent it will earn a person his or her eternity. Doing acts of kindness [hesed] and learning Torah are not only pleasurable ways to utilize the spare time that timesaving advances produce, but they also yield large amounts of spiritual profits.

Over 200 years ago Rav Haim Volozhin Zt'l said that America would be the last stop on the long journey of our exile. The redemption that he predicted can be earned by using our leisure time in spiritually productive ways. It is the best way to keep out of trouble and to EARN WHILE WE LEARN. May we all get the message of the generation of the Flood and correct their mistake by valuing time and using it productively.

Shabbat Shalom.

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