

1 Cheshvan 5765
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Noach

The Waters of Noach: A Lesson in Spiritual Self-Esteem

According to an article in the *Health* section of *The New York Times* this past Monday, over the past four years, the federal government has spent \$2.3 million on “prayer research” - research into the effectiveness of prayer. This has naturally raised the ire of many in this country who feel that such studies are wasteful. Dr. Richard J. McNally, a psychologist at Harvard, is quoted as having said, “It is just a nonstarter, in my opinion, a total waste of time and money.”

While Dr. McNally may very well be right, the fact remains that an awareness of the merits of prayer - and, for that matter, of all of the Mitzvos that we observe -- is absolutely necessary for Man to properly fulfill his mission in this World, and this is actually a central theme of Parshas Noach.

In the Haftorah of Parshas Noach, the Mabul (flood) is referred to as “Mei Noach” – “The waters of Noach” (Yeshaya 54:9). The connotation of this phrase is that Noach was, at some level, the cause or the bearer of responsibility for the Mabul. The Zohar (pg. 67b) in fact, derives from this *pasuk* that Noach was, indeed, held accountable for the calamity of the Mabul **because he did not daven for the salvation of the world**. (The Zohar says that when the Jews committed the sin of the *Egel* (the Golden Calf) and Hashem told Moshe that he would destroy them and rebuild a nation from Moshe’s descendants, Moshe responded that he would not be like Noach who earned the title of “possessor of the flood” (Mei Noach) because he failed to save his fellows by praying on their behalf.)

But what should lead us to believe that Noach’s prayers could, in fact, have saved the world? Where is there any indication that his prayers would have had that kind of power?

Harav Shimshon Pincus zt”l (Tiferes Torah, Parshas Noach) suggests that the answer to this question is found in Parshas Noach itself. The Torah records how after the Mabul, Noach offers korbanos to Hashem, and Hashem accepts the korbanos and responds that He will never again destroy the World. We thus see that Noach’s avodah (service of G-d) had the ability to protect not merely one generation, but all future generations from destruction. If his korbanos could save the world from another Mabul forever, they could certainly have prevented the mabul from coming in his time.

It is unfortunate that Noach discovered his own spiritual powers only after it was too late.

There are times in our lives when we discover someone who is in need or who is suffering and we rise to the occasion in providing chessed - warmth, support, and prayers on his or her behalf. Sometimes our response is so impressive that we surprise even ourselves as to how capable we are of ameliorating someone else’s pain. But once we become aware of our capabilities in helping someone who is already involved in a crisis, we must consider whether we couldn’t have channeled those same energies to save the person from hardship in the first place. Why wait until there is a crisis when we could prevent the problem from the beginning?

Noach made a discovery in “prayer research” but his discovery was too late in coming. Let us learn from this parsha the importance of maintaining an active awareness of our own

spiritual abilities so that rather than waiting until tragedy strikes, we may apply ourselves with alacrity in providing protective merits for those around us.