

“AND NOACH AND HIS SONS, AND HIS WIFE AND HIS SONS’ WIVES WENT WITH HIM INTO THE ARK...” (BEREISHIS 7:7)

***It would be inappropriate while the world is suffering***

THE RAINS OF THE FLOOD forced Noach and his family into the ark. Rashi (quoting the Midrash Tanchuma) points out that the unusual description of the boarding of the ark – Noach and his sons, followed by his wife and the sons’ wives – tells us that the men separated from the women. Noach and his family refrained from marital relations while on the ark, Rashi tells us, because it would be inappropriate while the world is suffering. It would be a violation of proper sensitivity for Noach’s family to be involved in pleasurable activity while the rest of creation is experiencing destruction and death.

Obviously, the rest of the living creatures of the world were immediately destroyed in the deluge. For the rest of the year that Noach spent on the Ark, the victims of the flood had no knowledge of what Noach’s family was doing and no increased suffering due to Noach’s behavior. People who are no longer alive cannot be in pain or insulted by the actions of the living. However, the sages of the Midrash are teaching us the higher ethical concept of developing correct feelings in those who remain alive, to avoid behaviors that – if the victims would still have been alive – would seem callous and uncaring in the context of so much death and suffering. Acting in a carefree, pleasure-seeking manner in the midst of the Flood would develop feelings of cruelty and insensitivity in the members of Noach’s family.

***This “violation” deserves further examination***

Still, this “violation” deserves further examination. Firstly, the generation that was destroyed in the Flood were depraved and wicked. They were so wicked that they deserved total destruction in an unprecedented manner. Furthermore, Noach was a great *tzadik*. When he had relations with his wife, his intentions were not for selfish indulgence and gratification, but rather for holy and pure intentions. If so, why should Noach and his family have to suffer along with these evildoers? The victims were getting what they deserved and Noach was doing what was normal and proper, and even a *mitzvah*. Indeed, there would have been a great benefit in not abstaining because the few survivors could begin to repopulate the world earlier. If so, why did they need to refrain from this important *mitzvah* just because of the suffering of the evil masses?

Hashem values the feelings of every living creature and as beings created in His image, we are expected to do the same. While we detest the actions of the wicked, we must have basic decency and care about the feelings of every human being, even debased, corrupt and immoral people. Therefore, it was inappropriate to enjoy even the small pleasure of an important *mitzvah* in the face of suffering of this wicked generation.

***Let us at least try to feel a little bit of their burden***

There is much tragedy and pain in the world around us, and with news reports constantly informing us of misfortune and violence, we can easily fall prey to the tendency to become callous and hardened to the suffering of others. Even if we cannot do anything to help their situation, let us at least try to feel a little bit of their burden and share in their plight. By cultivating these subtle sensitivities of refined character, we are imitating Our Father, our Creator and climbing ever higher on the lofty ladder of human perfection.