

erect a wall that will remain with you for all time. Build this house wisely. For even if you live in it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. Always remember that life is a do-it-yourself project!"

TORAH GEMS

כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ וגוי (וי-יב)

The *gemara* (סנהדרין ק"ה) teaches that the horrible effects of the flood wiped out not only the people of that generation but also the animals. This is referred to in this *posuk*, which states that "כל *"all flesh"* had become corrupt. This point is hard to understand. A human being, who has free will to do good or evil, at times may become corrupt. But how can an animal, who has no free will, veer from performing the will of *Hashem*?

The **Beis Halevi, R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ZT"V** ascertains that this is a fundamental lesson regarding the nature of man. It is known that if a person becomes used to transgressing, it becomes part of his nature and is very hard for him to change. This effect influences not only the person himself, but also the people around him. Even if a person sins privately he is strengthening the forces of desire in the world. Consequently, other people are influenced by these forces and are also led to sin. When humanity sinks to low levels of depravity, even the animals are affected by it.

This is what happened during the generation of Noah, when even the animals were sinning with species other than their own. Conversely, just as the wicked influence the entire world with their sins, the righteous also affect the entire world with their *mitzvos*. The **Sefer Mesilas Yeshorim** teaches that a person who rules over himself and serves *Hashem* is considered an assistant of *Hashem* Himself, and he is uplifted as he uplifts the entire world with him.

ונה בן שש מאות שנה והמבול היה מים על הארץ (ז-ו)

Rashi at the end of *Parshas Beraishis* writes that

Hashem delayed Noah's ability to reproduce until the age of 500 years in order to prevent him from having a large family. For had he had many sons who turned out to be wicked souls, Noah would suffer the great tragedy of losing his sons in the flood. If they would be righteous, Noah would have to build many more *- Arks*, to save all of them. Thus, *Hashem* saw to it that he should have only three sons under punishable age when the flood arrived. And what would be so terrible if he had many good sons? Wouldn't Noah be willing to build many arks to save them? Or even hire builders to help build extra arks for his sons? For this *Hashem* kept Noah childless for 500 years?

R' Chaim Shmulevitz ZT"V goes to great lengths to prove that in fact, Noah's ark was not just a physical boat. It was a miraculous vehicle of salvation. Even today's most powerful ships could not have withstood the fury of the flood. Noah took pieces of wood and infused them with the ability to save mankind. It was his sweat and tears of one hundred and twenty years of building in front of the eyes of the entire world. One hundred and twenty years of begging the people to repent. One hundred and twenty years of being ridiculed. This burning desire to save mankind, this self-sacrifice, saturated the wood of the ark and gave it the ability to be a salvation of mankind. This could only be done with Noah's own two hands. No one else felt the way he did. No other builder, no matter how talented and craft-worthy, could duplicate or even help Noah. The mission he was given was his alone and he set forth with great zeal to fulfill it. As a result, Noah could only build one ark - there was not the possibility of another.

בתשובותיו, דן ארוכה, האם עפ"י דין תורה אדם נקרא חי אם ניטל לבו או לא. ומביא מחלוקת הפילוסופים הקדמונים, גאלינוס ואריסטו. גאלינוס סבר שעיקר חיות האדם היא במוח, והביא ראיה לדבריו מאדם שנטל מקור חי את לבו ולאחר מכן המשיך הקוף לקפוץ ולפזז במשך 12 שעות. הרי אם לא היה עיקר החיות במוח, לא היה הקוף ממשיך לפעול כלל. אולם דעתו של ארוסטו היתה שונה, שהעיקר תוליה בלב, ואילו המוח

אחראי על כל תנועות האדם והקוף המשיך לקפוץ מפקודות ששיגורו אליו ע"י מוחו שנשארה מעט חיות. למסקנה, פסק החכם צבי שבאמת אדם בלא לב אינו נחשב חי. וכמו"כ פוסקי זמנינו הוכיחו מדברי הגמ" שקביעת המות תלויה בהפסקת הנשימה, ונטילת לבו של אדם שלקה במוח מוחי כמות כרצח, שכן אדם שנשימתו ולבו ממשיכים לפעול ע"י מכשירים רפואיים, א"א להגדירו כמת.

מעשה אבות.... סימן לבנים

ויאמרו הבנה לבנה ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר וגוי (יא-ג)

An embittered, middle-aged man once came to a *Rov* with complaints. "Tell me Rabbi, what does life have against me? Why is my existence so bland and lacking of real content? I've worked in the same job for many, many years and have little to show for it. My children grew up, moved out and barely keep in contact. I *daven* every day, learn what I must and am generally good about keeping the *mitzvos*. Why can't I see some enjoyment and quality from my life?"

The Rabbi knew the man well. He took the man's hand in his own and squeezed warmly. "Let me tell you a story," he said. "An elderly carpenter had plied his trade for many years. Finally, he decided that he was about ready to retire. He told his employer of his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife, enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They would get by.

"The contractor was sorry to see one of his very best workers go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter was hesitant as he really didn't feel up to continuing on in his work, but out of sheer loyalty to his boss who had treated him well over the years, he said yes. The problem soon became apparent, though, for in a short time it was clear and easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

"When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor ceremoniously handed the front-door key to the carpenter who looked at him with a mixture of incomprehension and amusement. 'My friend, this is your house,' he said. 'Let this be my going-away gift to you.' What a shock! What a shame! If the old carpenter had only known he was building his own house, he surely would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in this house, a home he knew he had built none too well."

The Rabbi considered his congregant for a long moment. "So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look back at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized what it all was about, we would have done it differently." The man lowered his head.

"Listen carefully," said the *Rov*, "What you must do is think of yourself as the carpenter. Think of your life as the house that you are building. Each day of your life, you hammer a nail, place a board, or