NO'ACH IN OUR GENERATION

Today, we live in an open society, more open than ever before. Ever since 1797, when Napoleon famously burned down the gates of the ghetto of Venice, we are no longer forced to live in those slum areas designated to be the Jewish Quarters of towns, or in ghettos. We do not suffer the restrictions of earlier times. We can go into any of the trades or professions. We do not need to hide our Jewishness and we are able to be part of the general, wider society and at the same time we are able to be Frum Yidden.

Of course, anti-Semitism is always present but anti-Semitism, that sick, irrational hatred towards the Jewish People, is the device that HaShem uses to ensure that we don't forget who we are. Of course, we don't like it. But it serves a purpose — like a shepherd's sheepdog. Picture the flock grazing peacefully in the meadow, with the shepherd carefully watching over his flock with his sheepdog lying at his side. But then the shepherd sees some of his sheep wandering away from the rest of the flock and going dangerously towards the edge of the cliff and he quickly sends his sheepdog to run round and bark and frighten the sheep back into the fold. The sheep are safe again and peace returns. That's the function of anti-Semitism and that's how we should view anti-Semites.

Similarly, today, in our open all-inclusive society, whenever we are in danger of forgetting who we are and what is our purpose as HaShem's Chosen People, HaShem sends us a reminder, and we are safe again. But it's just because we are so free that we must be exceedingly careful not to lose sight of our purpose and our calling as the עַם הַנִּבְחָר, the Chosen People of HaShem.

"אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ, נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק" — everyone knows the difference between אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ and נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק, that the Great Flood, the מַבּוּל, is called (in this week's Haftorah) "מֵי נֹחַ" — "the waters of No'ach" as if to rebuke No'ach for not stopping the מַבּוּל from happening.

But what about No'ach himself? Why did he indeed not try to improve the people of his time and save the world around him? It's all very well to criticise No'ach but we have to understand No'ach, too. Well, maybe No'ach indeed didn't warn the people and try to make them do תְּשׁוּבָה — simply because he knew too well that nothing would work! No'ach knew that the people didn't see any more that what they were doing was wrong! They said, "Life is long! What's the urgency? Life's a party!" "The main thing is to enjoy life!" "Anything goes!" "Do whatever you like!" "Just keep within the rules and you're alright!" "So long as you make sure that you steal less than an amount that can be recovered in the Courts and you don't break the law, you're OK!" "It's all fun and games!" "There's nothing wrong with doing anything — this is the life!" "Everybody's doing it!" And to No'ach they would say, "Why don't you join in, No'ach?" "Why are you so unsociable?" "What use are you to the world, keeping yourself aloof from everybody?" "You know what? — No'ach, ***you***'re the one who's not normal!" As Dayyan Abramsky, ז"ל says: "וַיַּרְא אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה"— it was only אֱ-לֹהִים Who saw that וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה — to everyone else, this was normal! When that happens, when they don't even see that they're evil, if they think that this is OK and that it's normal — then there's no hope! תְּשׁוּבָה ? Why? Repent from what? What's wrong?

That's why HaShem said to No'ach that "כֹּל אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ יִגְוָע". But גְּוִיעָה is said only about צַדִּיקִים, about righteous people! In fact, חז"ל tell us that we know that Yishmoel did תְּשׁוּבָה only because it says about him, "וַיִּגְוַע וָיָמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמָּיו"! And how does it come about that the expression "וַיִּגְוַע וָיָמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמָּיו" should at all signify that a person who experiences such a death means that he died a Tsaddik? Because "וַיִּגְוַע וָיָמָת" means to die easily, simply put, "to expire," "to breathe one's last." So how come that about this generation it should say, "כֹּל אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ יִגְוָע"? Because the people of the דּוֹר הַמַּבּוּל were so far gone, the vast majority of that generation really didn't know any more what was expected of them. They had "lost the plot." (Not the leaders and

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some really deliberate רְשָׁעִים, true, — after all, ***they*** knew exactly what they were doing and they wanted things that way.) But the rest of the people at that time were so far gone that HaShem had to get rid of them, yes, but why should they suffer? They were oblivious to how evil their society had become! So HaShem allowed them to die an easy death, "כֹּל אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ יִגְוָע" — they just "expired."

In the wider society of today, there is the constant propaganda, the relentless crusade, against morals and standards of virtue. Instead, there is almost a campaign to remove any self-control or moral constraints (much of it led by the oh-so-respectable leader of the media pack and the presumed representative voice of the Establishment in this country, the BBC) and this crusade has changed the viewpoint of even normal, honest-to-goodness people so that even they too are starting to think that maybe, yes, these "alternative lifestyles" are alright. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, was dead right: "Tell a lie often enough and loud enough and it will be accepted as the truth." Much of today's society is driven by wanting instant gratification of even the most immoral kind. Instead of genuine standards of true morality, the gravest offence in the minds of the moderns of today is — Heaven forbid! — that somebody should not have "mutual respect" for all kinds of perversion and "alternative lifestyles"! (But hypocrites and cheats that these moderns are, no respect or tolerance should be shown for normality or decency! Indeed, those who dare to be religious are ridiculed or they are hounded for their "old-fashioned" stance and because they refuse to go along with the immorality of the day, their schools are sharply criticised and branded as "failures." In the Britain of the 21st century, we Jews don't need to worry so much about anti-Semitism. It's Government-led ***anti-Judaism*** that we have to worry about now.) And of course, as the ancient forerunners of these moderns laughed at No'ach, so too do these modern-day crusaders scoff, "What use are you to the world and society?" "You must learn to integrate with the wider society!"

Well, let us imagine a person with a very powerful telescope standing on Mars, gazing at the watery Planet Earth, about 4214 years ago. He sees that the Planet Earth is even more watery than it usually is, in fact, it seems to be completely flooded with water! Then he notices a tiny black speck floating on the surface of the water and he wonders what it is.

"Of what use are you?" Well, the whole world, everything on Planet Earth perished, didn't it? And inside that black speck floating on the surface of those floodwaters is No'ach and his family, the ancestor of the whole new world. Seven billion people — all descended from this one "useless," "unsociable" person and his family! All life on earth descended from those creatures that he saved in his ark!

There are some scoffers and "worldly" people who sometimes dare to criticise our Yeshiva Bochurim or our Kollel Yungerleit, saying mindlessly, "Of what use are these people? Why don't they contribute to the well-being of the world!" (Or, in Erets Yisroel, "Why don't they go to the army?") The truth is just the opposite! "אִם לֹא בְּרִיתִי יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה, חוּקוֹת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא שַׂמְתִּי" — "If not for My Torah that is studied day and night, I would not have established the laws of heaven and earth!" says HaShem. It's only in the merit of their Torah learning that the world has any existence at all!

We have to resist their clamour and remember the Tsaddik No'ach. We can be proud to be HaShem's Chosen People. But we too, like No'ach, have to be strong, and despite almost the whole world going bad, we have to remember our purpose. "אַתֶּם עֵדַי" — "You are My witnesses!" says HaShem. But we are not alone like No'ach was; we can stand together and indeed be the אוֹר לַגּוֹיִם, the "light unto the nations," to teach, by example, about הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ.

The Torah world today is still only a very small minority of what is called the Jewish People, and an almost vanishingly small minority of the whole of humanity. But no matter — we take our inspiration from No'ach and he was an even smaller minority! Whereas he was alone in the world, we can take strength from each other and give strength to each other, אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ יַעֲזוֹרוּ, וּלְאָחִיו יֹאמַר חֲזַק, and by our example, collectively and individually, help to make this world a place fit for the Shechinah.