

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

NO'ACH

G-d said to No'ach... "Make yourself an ark... with compartments... This is how you shall make it: 300 amot long..." (6:13-14).

At the time, corruption was rife with law and order irretrievably broken down. G-d saw potential in no-one, except in No'ach himself. G-d's destiny for No'ach was that he and his family would survive the cataclysm to become the forbears of a new world civilization that was to be disciplined by the Sheva Mitzvot B'nei No'ach. These required respect for the sanctity of human life, human relations, animal life and personal property, duly enforced by a system of law and courts. Most of these things are derived from this week's parasha as explained in the Talmud Bavli (Sanhedrin 56ab).

Rashi wonders why G-d chose the ark. There were plenty of other ways He could have saved No'ach; why put him to all that trouble of building an ark? Quoting the Tanchuma, he explains that people would see what he was doing, ask questions, and then perhaps decide to change their ways while there was still time.

In addition, it may be suggested that getting him personally involved in the

long and extended preparations was G-d's preparing No'ach for his great task in changing the course of mankind. As Chazal emphasize, the more MESIRAT NEFESH you put into something, the more you own it; the more it belongs to you. Through the laborious work of building the ark to exact specifications and gathering in and taking care of the animals, he would feel himself partnered with G-d and thus be spiritually prepared to set humanity on a new and better trajectory by openly carrying out those very mitzvot that G-d gave to No'ach and his sons.

Extended preparations underlie much of our mitzvot observance and they greatly enhance our mitzvot observance. There's Friday's Shabbat preparations and even today's widespread custom of preparing the cholent on Thursday night to enter the Shabbat in a warm and prepared frame of mind, instead of the (familiar to some) 10-minute shower and change and then fast-off-to-shul that wrenches us out of our weekly activities. Other examples: we are urged to spend the 30-day period before Pesach studying the detailed laws of Pesach rather than waking up to the whole experience in the Ma Nishtana with silent regrets for 'not having just got round' to learning Pesach Divrei Torah beforehand. Indeed, in days of yore, leaders of the community would use that period to

ensure suitable arrangements for local matza baking and that the poor would have the necessities for the chag and the seder. We hear the shofar from Rosh Chodesh Elul to put us in the mood for teshuva that becomes increasingly urgent moving into selichot and then reach the crescendo as we usher in Rosh HaShana itself. We spend time checking through available arba'a minim before picking the particular ones that appear to be the most mehudarim, and then go further in keeping the arba'a minim together by personally knotting them before chag. Many skilfully make their own wicks for the Chanukiya oil before Chanuka. And so on.

Extended preparation was part of No'ach's own preparation to be at apex of starting a new civilization after the Flood. Extended preparation forms part of our way of life so that our participation and joy in the mitzvot is greatly enhanced and enriched as a result. So that in saying HINENI MUCHAN UM'ZUMAN, we can really mean it! 🌿📖